



## **An Introduction to Alternate Nostril Breathing**

These practices are forms of Pranayama (*Prana = breath, life force, energy, spirit. Ayama = restraint, control, conscious manipulation*). Forming an essential part of a yoga practice, pranayama builds self-awareness, fosters concentration skills and brings about a sense of wellbeing. The deep breathing improves circulation and encourages lymph drainage, rejuvenating the body.

### **Benefits**

Within our normal breathing patterns, we alternate nostril breathe anyway, meaning that one nostril is dominant at any one time and this changes every 2 or 3 hours. Scientist have discovered that when we inhale through the right nostril we stimulate the left hemisphere of the brain and vice versa. The ancient yogis thought that if this balance is disturbed, disease can result, hence the alternate breathing practices provide a balancing effect on mind and body. The central nervous system is affected, helping to balance the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems, which balances hormone levels, combatting the effects of stress, so boosting the immune system.

### **Contraindications**

The effects of the practice are subtle but very powerful so care should be taken to monitor how you feel. They are not suitable if you suffer from severe respiratory or cardiovascular or neurological conditions. Retention of the breath should not be practiced if you have untreated High or Low Blood Pressure, eye or ear problems, heart disorders, epilepsy or during pregnancy.

### **The Hand Position**

Using the right hand, place the thumb to the right nostril and the middle finger to the left nostril. The index finger is placed on the brow centre and the little and fourth curled into the palm. You can use the left hand if you like.

### **Anuloma Pranayama**

Breathe in though both nostrils and out through alternate. The natural lengthening of the exhalation makes this a very relaxing practice, calming and quietening the mind. Retention is not normally used with this practice.

## **Pratiloma Pranayama**

Breathe in through alternate nostrils and out through both. As there is resistance to the inhalation, this is a more energising and stimulating practice. Again, retention is not normally used.

## **Surya Bhedana**

Surya means sun, and this is a powerful energising and heating practice that stimulates the sympathetic nervous system. The subtle energy channel (nadi) activated is *pingala*, and corresponds to the right hand side of the body and the left hand side of the brain. Breathe in through the right nostril and out through the left. Retention of breath can be added and it should only really be practiced in the morning.

## **Chandra Bhedana**

Chandra means moon and this practice is cool and calming which increases the left side energy (*ida*) which activates the parasympathetic nervous system. This means that it is a good practice to switch on your relaxation response in the evening. Breathe in through the left and out through the right. Not advised if you're feeling depressed or prone to depression.

## **Nadi Sodhana**

*Nadi* means conduit for energy (Prana) and *Sodhana* means to cleanse, or purify. Breathe in through the right nostril, breathe out through the left. Breathe in through the left and out through the right. This constitutes one round. Initially practice 3-5 rounds, building up gradually to 10-12. Retention and ratios can be added with practice, provided there are no contraindications.

With all practices, listen to your body, and only proceed if comfortable.

