

Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing)

Nadi: energy channel | Shodhana: to purify

This technique is therefore said to cleanse or purify the energy channels within the body.

Purpose and Effects

- Balancing
- Grounding
- Generates calm and relieves stress
- Prepares you for meditation

Typically we don't breathe evenly through both nostrils – when we breathe we naturally and unconsciously shift between one nostril being dominant with a greater airflow, and the other being partially constricted. This natural decongestion / congestion of the nasal tissues occurs in cycles, the duration of each cycle ranging between 30 minutes to 6 hours, and the pattern continuing even while sleeping.

In his commentary of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika (HYP), Swami Muktibodhananda tells us that this nasal cycle was known to the yogis as swara yoga, with the breath alternating between the two energy channels ida (associated with the left nostril) and pingala (associated with the right nostril).

It is suggested that breathing through different nostrils has different effects on the body (ref: Yoga as Medicine, Dr Timothy McCall):

Left Nostril Breathing	Right Nostril Breathing
Stimulates parasympathetic nervous system (relaxation response)	Stimulates sympathetic nervous system (fight or flight response)
Stimulates right hemisphere of the brain e.g. creativity	Stimulates left hemisphere of the brain e.g. thinking / analytical
Increases spatial performance	Increases verbal performance
Lowers blood sugar levels	Increases blood sugar levels
Decreases heart rate	Increases heart rate
Inflates left lung preferentially	Inflates right lung preferentially

And that breathing through different nostrils has different effects in relation to the corresponding nadi (ida or pingala):

Left Nostril Breathing (Chandra – Moon)	Right Nostril Breathing (Surya – Sun)
Passive / calm	Dynamic / physical
Cooling	Heating

Inward looking	Outward looking
Intuitive	Rational

Nadi Shodhana is said to restore balance, bringing the breath into harmony, balancing the corresponding energies and cleansing the nadis.

Technique

Nadi Shodhana uses the mudra that applied in the anuloma / viloma techniques; namely Mrgi & Vishnu or Nasagra (refer to your anuloma / viloma handouts from Days 4 and 5 for a reminder of the mudras).

Remember to use the right hand for this mudra. If you feel the right arm tires you may wish to rest it against the ribs or onto a bolster or cushion resting on the lap.

A light pressure should be applied when closing the nostril – this should be gentle and with no force.

- Come into a comfortable seated position, use a chair if this helps you maintain steadiness and length through the spine. Relax the eyes, face, neck, shoulders.
- Rest your attention on the natural flow of your breath for a few rounds until you feel yourself begin to settle.
- Take a complete inhale and complete exhale
- Close right nostril
- Inhale left
- Close left nostril
- Exhale right. Inhale right
- Close right nostril
- Exhale left.

This is one round. Gradually increase the number of repetitions to 5 or 10 rounds.

Variation

- Come into a comfortable seated position, use a chair if this helps you maintain steadiness and length through the spine. Relax the eyes, face, neck.
 - Allow the arms to rest by the sides of the body, with the palms facing forwards. Shoulders relaxed.
 - Rest your attention on the natural flow of your breath for a few rounds until you feel yourself begin to settle.
 - Bring your awareness to your arms – all the way from the shoulders to the fingertips.
 - Take a complete inhale: draw your awareness from the fingertips to the shoulders
 - Take a complete exhale: send your awareness from the shoulders to the fingertips.
 - Inhale: draw awareness from left fingertips to the left shoulder
 - Exhale: awareness descends from right shoulder to right fingertips
 - Inhale: right fingertips to right shoulder
 - Exhale: left shoulder to left fingertips
- This is one round. Repeat for 3 – 5 rounds.

Alternatively you can visualise or imagine the breath moving along the nostrils in this same pattern.

Considerations & Cautions

Nadi Shodhana should not be practiced if your nose is congested or blocked e.g. a cold, hayfever, nasal polyps etc, or if closing the nostrils makes you feel claustrophobic. (Instead you could use the visualisation technique mentioned above).