



# Full Yogic Breath

The complete yogic breath teaches us to utilise the three anatomical parts of our lungs. Because of poor posture and bad habits arising from unconscious carelessness, many of us breathe shallowly or with compressed lungs, depriving our body of essential oxygen. Furthermore, insufficient exhalation poisons the body by building up carbon dioxide in our system.

Once we become aware of our breathing and recognise that it is the way in which we can control the energy of our body and mind, we can begin to use it. Without proper breathing, hatha yoga is simply a physical exercise. When we start to move with the breath, we experience a change in our state of mind. We become relaxed, focused, and peaceful. We also begin to enjoy our bodies.

With mindfulness and concentration, we can send the energy of the breath throughout the body, releasing tensions, supplying strength, and bringing stillness to areas where we are troubled. When practicing yoga, we often discover parts of our body that are tight, sore, numb, or painful of which we were not even aware. This is the process of developing mindfulness.

The breath is also a useful tool for meditation. By bringing our awareness to the breath, by actually sitting in physical stillness and taking the time to simply listen to it, we can quiet the mind. Most of our thinking is simply illusions the mind creates to distract us from reality. We often miss out on our own lives by living inside our heads. When we calm the mind, we open our awareness to the direct experience of the present. It is at that moment that you discover your true nature and the nature of the world around you.

## **Relaxation techniques**

Relaxation techniques start by taking your consciousness away from emotionally charged thoughts and directing it to activities that are emotionally neutral such as breath and body awareness. If your attention is on your big toe it is difficult to stay angry, the same is true if you are focussed on the movement of air in and out of the body. Tension will be released with the implementation of conscious deep breathing and the rotation of awareness through various muscles and parts of the body.

## **The full body or Yogic breath**

The yogic breath allows the body to release tension by slowing down the breathing rate, utilising increased air and pranic (energy) capacity and engaging the parasympathetic nervous system (rest and repair). Alternatively, with shallow and quick breathing the sympathetic nervous system activates the ‘flight and fight’ response in which adrenalin





# Full Yogic Breath

and cortisone fill the physical body, a caustic element to cellular health and overall well-being.

For the most part people have very shallow breathing that originates in the upper regions of the torso – effectively the shoulder area. These muscles often give great problems as tension is being held in these areas, especially with work at a computer or desk and even driving will be exacerbate this tension. Shallow breathing increases the work load and will over use those muscles which attach to the rib cage and facilitate the mechanics of breathing.

## **Learn breathing... the yoga way**

With the ever-increasing incidence of lifestyle diseases like cardio-vascular and nervous system disorders, the time has come for us to address this ourselves, fair and square WITHOUT external dependence.

Did you know that reprogramming your natural breathing technique would not only help in preventing these problems but also help in the “reversal” of several such harmful conditions? Yes, it’s not only possible but proven too. In fact leading cardiac experts are advocating the benefits of “correct” breathing to their patients.

Surprising as it is, almost none of us use the full capacity of our respiratory organs. This is aggravated by our sedentary lifestyles and leads to several complications popularly called - lifestyle disorders.

The first question that comes to mind is – “How can I alter my natural breathing process?” Well, astonishing as it may seem, it’s quite straightforward. By training our body to breathe in a particular fashion, we re-program our involuntary system to adopt a new way of breathing.

This breathing technique is called the “Full Yogic breath” or simply Yoga breathing.

First, lie down on your back, relaxed, with hands and legs outstretched and eyes looking up towards the sky. Gently close your eyes and relax.

## **Step 1: Abdominal breathing**

Observe your natural breath. You will notice that as you inhale the abdomen rises and then falls with exhalation. Watch this for a few moments to check this flow. Now begin to deepen, lengthen and extend that movement. That is, while inhaling, let the abdomen





# Full Yogic Breath

rise to its limit and at exhalation let it fall completely. Keep the chest still during this entire process – only move the abdomen. Continue this for 20 breaths and then rest.

## **Step 2: Thoracic (chest) breathing**

Again observe your normal breath, this time focusing your attention on the chest. You will notice the chest moving slightly up at inhalation and down with exhalation. Again observe this pattern for a few moments. Now again, begin to deepen, lengthen and extend that movement. This time, on inhalation expand and lift the rib cage, filling the lungs completely. Then on exhalation, let the lungs collapse fully, sinking to the limits. In this step, keep the abdomen still, moving only the chest. Do this for 20 breath cycles and then stop

## **Step 3: Upper chest/shoulder breathing**

Focussing on your upper chest, lift and rise into the upper chest and shoulders on the inhalation and relax fully on the exhalation. Again practise for 20 breath cycles.

## **Step 4: Full Yogic breathing**

This combines the above 3 steps in the following way:

First inhale by filling the abdomen and then CONTINUE inhaling as you expand and fill the chest, followed by the upper chest and shoulders. Then exhale first from the abdomen, then the chest, then the upper chest/shoulders. This is one round of the full yogic breath. Repeat this for 20 rounds.

Remember the pattern... Inhaling - abdomen then chest then upper chest/shoulders; Exhaling – abdomen then chest then upper chest/shoulders.

**GOLDEN RULE:** All of the above steps should be done WITHOUT strain. The natural tendency is to heave with effort. The right way is to make it smooth and effortless. Go slow and easy.

Initially you will experience unevenness or bumps in this breathing process – as if there are 4 separate parts to the full yogic breath. This is natural considering the years we have spent breathing improperly.

Instead, try to picture this breath as a continuous wave like pattern – as if the breath moves up from the navel to the throat with every inhalation and then, down from the





# Full Yogic Breath

throat to the navel with each exhalation. It may take a few weeks of practice to perfect a “SMOOTH flowing pattern with MINIMUM effort and with MAXIMUM capacity.”

This is the desired effect!! Over time, the yoga way of breathing will come naturally to you.

## **And now for the all-important benefits...**

The full yogic breath is the basic building block of the powerful yoga breathing techniques, also called ‘Pranayama’ in Sanskrit, which are known for their multifarious benefits.

## **But the tangible benefits of the full yogic breath are that it:**

- Releases acute and chronic muscular tensions around the heart and digestive organs.
- Helps sufferers of respiratory illnesses such as asthma and emphysema to overcome the fear of shortness of breath. It actually increases lung capacity.
- Encourages proper nervous stimulus to the cardio-vascular system
- Dramatically reduces emotional and nervous anxiety
- Improves detoxification through increased exchange of carbon dioxide and oxygen
- Amplifies the auto immune system by increased distribution of energy to the endocrine system
- Calms the mind and integrates the mental / physical balance.
- And the real icing is that it contributes to both vitality and relaxation through this single practice.

With such powerful all-round benefits, do you really need to be “motivated” to get going?

*Go ahead, and take charge of your life like never before.*

