



**These 4 Pranayama
Breathing Techniques Allow
You to Enter a Heightened
State of Awareness**



Pranayama is a Sanskrit word which translates to “the control of life force”. With Prana meaning “life force” and ayama meaning “extending or stretching”, this practice cultivates the extension of breath as a means to regulating the oxygen within our body on a cellular level.

Controlled breathing stimulates the autonomic nervous system (connected to physical processes such as digestion, respiration, heart rate, immune function, peristalsis, and even sexual arousal), as well as the vagus nerve, which regulates stress by releasing neurotransmitters in the brain that reduce anxiety. Scientific research has shown that integrating a regular practice of Pranayama allows for a decrease of stress, and overall increase on physical, emotional, and mental health.

The following 4 Pranayama techniques from [One Medical](#) are simple ways you can enter a heightened state of awareness, and increase your overall mood/well-being just with your breath.

1. Nadhi Sodhana aka Anuloma Viloma

Nadhi sodhana, also known as alternative nostril breathing, is a very relaxed, balancing breath that is used to help calm the nervous system and aid in a restful night's sleep. By increasing the amount of oxygen taken into the body, it's believed that this breath can also purify the blood, calm the mind, reduce stress, and promote concentration.

How to do it: Nadhi sodhana can be done seated or lying down. To start, empty all the air from your lungs. Using the thumb of your dominant hand, block your right nostril and inhale through your left nostril only. Be sure to inhale into your belly, not your chest. Once you are full of breath, seal your left nostril with the ring finger of the same hand, keeping your right nostril closed, and hold the breath for a moment. Then release your thumb and exhale through your right nostril only. Be sure to exhale all the breath out of the right side and pause before inhaling again through the same side. Seal both nostrils once you've inhaled on the right side and exhaled through the left side. A complete cycle of breath includes an inhalation and exhalation through both nostrils. If you're just starting out, you can do a four-count inhale, holding your breath for four to eight counts, then exhale for four counts. Perform up to ten cycles and notice how your body responds. You may feel more relaxed and calm in both your mind and body.

When to do it: Nadhi sodhana is a calm, soothing breath that can be done any time of day. Try practicing this technique when you are anxious, nervous, or having trouble falling asleep.

2. Kapalabhati Pranayama

Kapalabhati means skull shining breath. It's a pranayama exercise as well as an internal *kriya*, or cleansing technique. Practitioners of kapalabhati believe that this breath will help clear mucus in the air passages, relieve congestion, reduce bloating, and improve lung capacity. Kapalabhati is an invigorating breath that can build heat in the body.

How to do it: Start by sitting in a comfortable seat with a tall, straight spine, and exhale completely. Inhale briefly through both nostrils, then sharply exhale (again out of your nose) while pulling your navel in toward your spine. The exhalation is short and quick, but very active, while the inhalation is short and passive. Again, pull your navel in as you exhale and soften it on the inhalation. Do one round of 30 (counting your exhalations) and rest for a minute with some deep breaths in between. Repeat. If this seems strenuous, start with 15 and gradually work your way up.

When to do it: Kapalabhati is great to do in the morning if you're feeling chilly or sluggish. You may also try it when you're feeling congested or bloated, but don't try it on a full stomach. Avoid this technique if you are pregnant, or suffer from blood pressure issues or heart conditions.

3. Ujjayi Pranayama

Ujjayi means victorious breath; it's also referred to as ocean breath due to the sound it creates. This breath is often used in *asana* (posture) practice, especially in ashtanga and vinyasa classes. Ujjayi encourages full expansion of the lungs, and, by focusing your attention on your breath, it can assist in calming the mind.

How to do it: Find a place where you can sit comfortably with a straight spine. Take a steady breath in through both nostrils. Inhale until you reach your lung capacity; maintain a tall spine. Hold your breath for a second, then constrict some of the breath at the back of your throat, as if you were about to whisper a secret, and exhale slowly through both nostrils. This exhalation will sound like an ocean wave or gentle rush of air. You should feel the air on the roof of your mouth as you exhale. Repeat up to 20 times.

When to do it: This breath can be practiced for up to 10 minutes at any time of day. Try it with an *asana* practice as well.

4. Sitali Pranayama

Sitali also means cooling, which explains the effect it can have on your mind and body. This breath encourages clearing heat with coolness. It's especially helpful during summer and in hot climates.

How to do it: Roll your tongue until the outer edges touch, forming a tube. If you can't curl your tongue, make an oval shape with your mouth, keeping your tongue flat. Inhale through your mouth, taking in all the air that you can. It may make a hissing sound. After inhaling, bring the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth and seal your lips. Feel the coolness of the inhalation in your mouth then exhale through your nose. Repeat five to ten times or as needed.

When to do it: If you're feeling overheated, irritable, or find yourself waiting impatiently in hot weather, *sitali* is a great tool to try to cool off and relax!