

Yoga Therapy

By Kate Mandlik

“Teach yoga, heal everyone, help them, and when one realizes the Self, everything happens.”

- Swami Satyananda Saraswati

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Yogic Perspective of Disease

Man today is sick because he thinks he is sick. We stand hypnotized by the belief that disease and illness is our fate and destiny, rather than health and bliss, which are truly our birthright and heritage...

Swami Satyananda

All schools of yoga view disease as the physical manifestation of an imbalance between material and spiritual life. They differ on the specific nature of the imbalance and therefore the approach to curing it.

Hatha View

According to the *Hatha* yoga perspective disease is caused by an imbalance of ida (mind) & pingala (body) nadis. Yoga considers health in terms of prana (life force). The moment prana is not present, death ensues. Just the absence of disease does not mean that there is good health. Positive health means balanced prana; negative health happens whenever there is an imbalance in prana. The objective of the yoga journey is to master prana. Prana flows through the nadis, when these are blocked this leads to ill health. When the blockage is resolved/cleared, prana flows freely and positive health is restored.

There can be an imbalance of prana without the manifestation of disease. In modern life this often has to do with stress and lifestyle. A disciplined lifestyle brings efficiency in terms of prana taken in versus prana needed to support the body in its functioning. Stress means that there is overuse of various energies or body systems. Food is a major component here and a good example- easy to digest food gives far more good quality prana without using up that much, whilst heavy food requires more prana for its digestion. Genes also play their part in how balanced somebody is by nature, it can be said that this is where karma plays a role.

Balance of body-mind is achieved through the yogic practices (principally asanas, pranayama, cleansing). Asanas restore the lost balance of various body systems due to mental problems. Static asanas are more helpful as maintaining a pose for longer is training the brain to deal with anxiety and stress whilst relaxing at the same time. This leads to tolerance of the nervous system, better neuromuscular coordination, and secretion of endorphins. Asanas also bring healthier breathing pattern which in turn controls mind.

Pranayama helps expand the lungs, changes unhealthy breathing habits and helps with controlling the mind as well. Controlling breathing uses the cerebral cortex which trains it to help control of cognitive and mental functions. Cleansing techniques involve controlling involuntary responses and cleaning the accumulated toxins and waste products to help in balancing mental functions. Accumulated toxins in the body affect mental functions negatively, removing toxins and waste products brings mental harmony.

Ashtanga View

Ashtanga Yoga sees disease as uncontrolled *Vrittis* (fluctuations) of mind which cause distortions in true perception of reality. *Vrittis* are conditionings that arise because the mind identifies itself with desires and thoughts. The true nature of the mind is something beyond these physical conditionings – a state that is blissful and peaceful. Patanjali's sutras state that everything we experience originates in the mind, including the physical manifestation of disease. Why does one immune system fight off an infection whilst another succumbs to it? Again the answer is stress, which reduces immune function.

In *Ashtanga* positive health means being in control of every activity in the mind, even at the deepest level, and all of the mind's functionings – thoughts, attitudes, memories, emotions all need to be balanced. By silencing the *vrittis* all that is left is pure mind (consciousness). Achieving this is extremely difficult!

In ashtanga yoga, yoga is approached as a discipline to control the varying patterns of mind. It helps remove the old conditionings, likes & dislikes; increases willpower, controls the desires, cultivating the right aspirations, faith and devotion and balances the body, mind and soul. Working towards self-evolution / realization, the yogi replaces unhelpful old thinking patterns with the attitudes of 'Maitri - Sukha, Karuna - Dukhaha, Mudita – Punya & Upeksha – Papa' towards life events and develops opposite positive emotions to deal with negative emotions. These attitudes are: when there is stress, pain or suffering develop compassion / forgiveness for yourself and others, acceptance with all faults, limitations, guilt, sufferings. Cravings, desires – become friend with the thoughts; good karma – feel happy and joyful; bad karma – try to ignore and forget.

Although we can't look into somebody's mind, there are a few indicators to see how in control of it somebody is. One indicator is what sort of dreams you have. Another is by measuring brain waves. The four types of waves are: Delta, 0-4 cycles per second, deep sleep. Gamma, 4-8 cycles p/s, meditative, spiritual state. Alpha, 8-12 cycles p/s, asleep and Beta, 12-16 cycles, awake. Somebody who is very in control of their mind (due to the practice of meditation) will be able to put themselves into a Gamma state of mind.

Bhakti

In *Bhakti* Yoga disease is seen as the false identification of self with the body and its desires, which gives rise to unpleasant emotions. 90% of our actions aim to satisfy desires and material needs because we identify with body and senses alone. Bhakti says body and soul are different. Body is only the container whilst the soul is the owner. We need to learn to move our identification away from the body and senses. Almost all problems we have can be traced back to this identification.

Because of false identification we don't have true understanding of our body. Masters can decide when they want to leave their body, they understand their body is not who they really are. E.g. Swami Satyananda had no illness or disease but simply realised that his work in this body is over. He told people that he planned to depart and that they should not stop him anymore, as he will come back. His soul departed as he sat in padmasana.

Good health means having balanced emotions. When you are angry or irritated, physiological changes occur such as raised respiration and heart rates, sweating and other effects of the activation of the 'fight or flight response'. There was good evolutionary reason for that response to develop, but generally we do not face such mortal danger anymore. Instead the response is triggered by an emotional reaction to a non-dangerous event. The more often you get angry, the more stressed you generally are, leading to premature ageing. When the emotional mind is balanced, you achieve a positive state of health.

Bhakti yoga or yoga of unconditional love cultivates faith, devotion and surrender and helps to get rid of ego, fear, desires, anger, hatred, jealousy. It removes stress, builds stronger relationships and bonds including the connection with mother nature. Research on faith shows that it aids healing and eases mental stress, anxiety and depression.

From the *Karma* Yoga perspective, disease arises when actions are motivated by material and selfish desires. Your actions are at the root of your mental state and behaviour. Thus your action makes your mind. Good health and balance is achieved through selfless service: not expecting any results from one's actions, working without ego. If you want to control your mind, emotions and lifestyle... it all starts with karma.

Yogic Lifestyle and Ashram Life

To achieve and maintain positive health, material and spiritual life should be balanced. Yogic lifestyle is a combination of karma, hatha, ashtanga and bhakti yoga. This requires a balanced, disciplined lifestyle consisting of the following components

- *Mantras* – positive and focused mind training.
- Yoga Practice – balancing body and mind (Asanas for strong and healthy body systems. Pranayama for increasing pranic energy. Cleansing to prevent blockages in prana. Meditation for a balanced mind.)
- Yoga Food – Sattvik food (pure & easy to digest), vegetarian diet, in right quantity
- Yoga discipline – healthy habits such as sleep (right amount at right time), refraining from harmful behavior like smoking, drinking
- *Karma* Yoga – Balancing the action (actual behavior)
- *Bhakti* Yoga – Balancing the emotions (willpower, feelings)
- *Jnana* Yoga – Balancing intellect (thoughts, reasoning)

The latter three is where we expend our energy. They need to be in balance because they interact and depend on each other. E.g. somebody wants to quit smoking, because the intellect knows it is unhealthy. But the emotions still want to smoke and therefore the resulting action is smoking. At some level they want to be a different person, but they do not want to do the necessary work. The answer is not to suppress the desire- this just pushes it deeper and locks it in, which only causes further problems such as (at an extreme) cancer.

Instead, understanding and acceptance is the key. Thus yoga is all about using understanding and acceptance to unite and balance karma, bhakti and jnana so that a person can achieve health and balance. In our modern, consumerist society excitement and sense stimulation is usually the main aim of any action. The aim of yogic action is to balance these three energies, which leads to contentment rather than excitement.

A way of remembering how to live with balance in the present moment is by remembering AUM- work with complete Acceptance, Understanding and Managing. *Acceptance* of self (everything like body, emotions, personality, intelligence and other conditionings as well as your individual SWAN) and world (including people, culture, environment etc.) acceptance of past, all events.

Understanding of self, reactions, emotions, desires, limitations & conditionings. Of others and their reactions, emotions, desires, limitations & conditionings. Of society, the world around, rules of nature, rules of society. Understanding situations from others' point of view. Be friends with your mind, emotions and reactions, connect with others by understanding them, understand the situation in a detached manner or as a neutral observer, and do not put responsibility on any particular aspect.

Managing emotions, thoughts and actions by doing without any attachment to the fruit of action whether from self, from others or from destiny/luck/God. The aim is to merge the self with the karma as a Dharma. The most important way to achieve this is through Seva or community work.

Pranayam

- ॐ Natural Breathing
- ॐ Basic Abdominal breathing
- ॐ Thoracic breathing
- ॐ Clavicular breathing
- ॐ Yogic breathing
- ॐ Deep breathing with ratios
- ॐ Fast breathing
- ॐ Viloma – Interrupted Breathing
- ॐ AnulomVilom – Alternate Nostril Breathing
- ॐ Cooling Breath - Sheetal, Sitkari, Kaki mudra
- ॐ Ujjayi – Victorious Breath
- ॐ Bhramari – Humming Bee Breath
- ॐ Bhastrika – Bellow’s Breath
- ॐ Surya Bhedan – Right Nostril Breathing

**Please note that these breathing practices do not have kumbhak described in their techniques as breath retention is contra-indicated for the large majority of students receiving yoga therapy.*

Natural Breathing

Natural breathing is basically breath awareness. It is the starting point of working with the breath. It allows us to understand how we are breathing and our breathing patterns. It is relaxing, soothing, can be practiced at any time and is the basic starting point of meditation.

Sit in a comfortable position. The body is stable, the shoulders are relaxed, chest is open and eyes gently closed. Become aware of the breath. Notice if it is shallow or deep. Notice what part of the body is moving, the abdomen or the chest. Notice if there is any sound with the breath. Try to focus only on the breath. Try to become aware of the temperature of the breath. When the air is inhaled it is a little cool, when it is exhaled it is a little warmer. Notice the difference. Notice if the breath is becoming smoother and deeper. Notice if there is any strain. Be aware only of the breath. Now try to become more aware of the breath entering the nostrils. Focus only on the nostrils. Now notice the breath flowing down towards the lungs. Focus only on that area. Now focus on the lungs, only on the lungs. Now try to follow the air flowing from the nostrils and down into the lungs. Follow the breath with the inhalation and exhalation. Try to focus only on the breath. Continue with this practice for as long as is comfortable.

Basic Abdominal Breathing

This should be practiced before any pranayam for at least a few minutes and we should always breath with our diaphragm for all breathing techniques. Sit in a comfortable sitting position, using the wall, a chair, cushions or bolsters as support if needed. Alternatively lie in shavasana or tadagasana. Tadagasana is useful during pregnancy as it allows the lower back to relax, however in the later stages of pregnancy sitting is preferred.

Place one hand on the belly and the other on the chest. Inhale deeply, using the diaphragm. If one is using the diaphragm then as one inhales the diaphragm will move downward, pushing the abdominal contents down and out, making the abdomen rise. On exhalation the diaphragm will move upward and the abdomen will fall. Continue the practice. This is the type of breathing we want to practice. If the chest is moving then we are still breathing shallow, without the diaphragm. If we use the diaphragm then the lower lobes of the lungs are being used, improving their efficiency and giving a positive effect to the heart, liver, stomach and intestines. It is the most natural and efficient

way to breathe, however many people do not breathe in this way due to the modern lifestyle. Just by altering the way we breathe we can see huge benefits.

Thoracic Breathing

This type of breathing is mostly helpful to create awareness in how we breathe and as a stepping stone to learning yogic breathing. It is the common way many of us breathe which expends more energy than abdominal breathing.

To practice thoracic breathing one starts with breath awareness and then tries to focus on expanding the ribcage only, without using the diaphragm. The focus should be only on the expansion of the chest as one inhales and the contraction of the chest as one exhales.

Clavicular Breathing

This type of breathing is generally done in combination with thoracic breathing in periods of great stress such as strong physical exertion or obstructive airways problems such as asthma or emphysema. The upper ribs and collar bones are pulled upward by the sternum and neck and this allows more air into the lungs. In yoga we only use it alone to create awareness and then afterwards combine it with thoracic and abdominal breathing to form yogic breathing.

To practice clavicular breathing one starts with breath awareness and then thoracic breathing for a few minutes. After that breathe in fully, into the chest, from there try to breathe in a little more so that one can feel the expansion right into the upper lungs. The collar bones and shoulders will raise up slightly. Next exhale, first relaxing the neck and upper chest and then the ribcage. Continue a few rounds.

Yogic Breathing

This involves the use of the abdomen, chest and clavicular region. It can also be practiced before other breathing techniques. It allows one to have maximum inhalation and exhalation. It can be combined with deep breathing (using a ratio).

Inhale slowly, allowing the abdomen to rise. When the abdomen had expanded as much as it can allow the chest to expand outward and upward. Once the ribs have expanded as much as they can inhale a little more so that the collar bones move up slightly. Then slowly exhale first allowing the collar bones to move downward, then the chest and finally the abdomen. Continue the practice without any strain, jerks or tension. The breath should feel natural and after some time it should be mostly thoracic and abdominal breathing. Abdominal breathing should be at least 70% of the breath.

Deep Breathing

Begin with normal breathing, ideally abdominal or yogic breathing, bringing awareness to the movement of the abdomen and the chest. Inhale deeply and smoothly in counts (use a timer, metronome, clock or count in your head, a nice way is to say 1 aum, 1 aum etc) according to the ratio you are following (see below). Exhale smoothly in the required counts. Continue this process. Be aware of the abdomen rising and falling with the breath. Return to normal breathing. Practice another round if desired.

Ratio - This may be 4:4 to start. This means inhale to 4 counts and exhale to 4 counts. If this causes strain then start with 3:3 or 2:2. After some time, when it is very comfortable to practice 4:4 the ratio can be changed. Start exhaling for longer, 4:6. Later this can be increased to 4:8. Remember there is no rush to do this. After some time one can start 5:5 then 6:6 but at no time should it cause strain.

Benefits

- Due to slowing of respiration rate the heart rate is reduced.
- Blood pressure is lowered.
- Stress and stress related ailments. Anxiety, tension, anger.
- More oxygen is made available per breath, making the breathing most efficient.
- Conscious deep breathing greatly affects the cortical activities, relaxing the nervous system, which calms the mind by removing thoughts and emotions.
- Enhanced movement of the diaphragm gives a good massage to the internal organs as the liver, pancreas, stomach, heart and lungs are attached to the diaphragm which is moved up and down during the breathing.
- Good preparation for labour
- Gives us control over our breath

Precautions & Contraindications

There are no contraindications as such however the breathing must be smooth and rhythmic and not in steps. There should never be strain and one should not feel that they are running out of breath.

Fast Breathing

Types of Fast Breathing:

Type1: Inhaling and exhaling through both nostrils.

Type2: Close the right nostril and inhale and exhale through the left nostril.

Type 3: Close the left nostril and inhale and exhale through the right nostril.

Type 4: Inhale through the left nostril and exhale through the right nostril.

Type 5: Inhale through the right nostril and exhale through the left nostril.

Type 6: Inhale through the left nostril, exhale through the right, inhale through the right and then exhale through left.

Begin with normally breathing, bringing awareness to the movement of the abdomen and the chest. Place the right hand in Pranava Mudra and bring the hand to the lips. Block the appropriate nostril depending on the fast breathing type being performed. Begin inhalation and exhalation, building up speed. Practice fast inhalations and exhalations, about 30 times is enough when pregnant. Reduce the speed and return to normal breathing. Make sure the body remains relaxed and steady throughout the practice.

Benefits

- Due to the fast inhalations and exhalations, the carbon dioxide levels in the blood fall and oxygen levels increase in the blood. Rich oxygenated blood is supplied to the vital organs, improving their function.
- Due to rapid exchange of gases on a cellular level, toxins are removed and the cells are revitalized.
- The fast movement of the diaphragm gives massage to the digestive organs, lungs and heart, increasing their efficiency.
- Increases the overall prana in the body.
- Gets rid of excess mucus which helps in removing sinusitis and common cold etc.
- Clears blocked nostrils in preparation for pranayam
- Increases lung capacity
- Preparation for labour, particularly during contractions

Precautions & Contraindications

Should be avoided if one has high blood pressure, heart problems, ulcers or hernia.

Only a small amount (1-2 rounds) of fast breathing should be done during pregnancy and only if it feels comfortable to do so. It is not recommended in the first trimester and is generally not comfortable to do in the third trimester. If one feels any dizziness or light headedness it should be avoided. If this happens stop the fast breathing and hold the breath for about 10 seconds, or try to inhale and exhale in a paper bag, then continue normal breathing. If one has any complications during pregnancy then avoid fast breathing completely.

Viloma Breathing – Interrupted Breathing

Start with relaxed breathing. Imagine a set of stairs or imagine a ladder in one's body, with the base at the pelvic floor and the top at the throat.

- ॐ Start inhaling but instead of inhaling smoothly like in deep breathing inhale in steps. Imagine you are walking up the steps or visualise the prana moving up the ladder in your body. There should be between 3-5 steps. Keep inhaling till you reach the top and the lungs are full. Slowly exhale, smoothly, without steps till the lungs feel empty. Continue the practice.
- ॐ Next inhale smoothly and completely then exhale in steps, moving down the stairs or ladder till the breath has been fully expelled and you have reached the bottom of the ladder. Continue the practice.
- ॐ Next inhale and exhale in steps, a combination of the first two techniques.
- ॐ Finish with a few rounds of relaxed breathing or continue with deep breathing.

Benefits

- Preparation for deep breathing
- Helps give finer control over the flow of air
- Helps to expand breath capacity
- Preparation for labour

Precautions & Contraindications

There should be no jerking movements in the steps and no strain at any time.

Anulom Vilom – Alternate Nostril Breathing

Make the pranava mudra with the right hand. Pranava mudra is made by bending the index and middle finger towards the palm. When we bring the right hand up to the nose we can block the right nostril with the thumb and then change to blocking the left nostril with the ring finger, which may be supported with the little finger. In this way we can move the hand from side to side, as needed. Slowly inhale through the left nostril, close the nostril and exhale slowly through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril and then exhale through the left nostril. This is one round. Continue at your own pace. If that is comfortable a ratio can be added, such as 4:4 or 4:8. Always start by inhaling through the left nostril and finish by exhaling through the left nostril. The left nostril relates to the calming energy in our body so it will give us more benefits to practice in this way.

Benefits

- The whole body is nourished by the extra supply of oxygen
- Blood is purified of any toxins
- The brain centres are stimulated to work to their optimum capacity
- Gives tranquility, clarity of thoughts and improved concentration
- Lowers levels of stress and anxiety
- Increases vitality
- Function of all systems (endocrine, digestive, excretory, reproductive, nervous, respiratory, circulatory) are improved
- Balances left and right energy pathways, ida and pingala, clearing pranic blockages. This can awaken sushumna.

Precautions & Contraindications

There are no contraindications as such however the breathing must be smooth and rhythmic and not in steps. There should never be strain and one should not feel that they are running out of breath. One should choose a ratio that suits them. If one has a cold or one nostril is blocked then it can be better to practice deep breathing or do a round of fast breathing first.

Cooling Breath

Sheetali (Sheetal - that which is calm and soothing)- Open the mouth and extend the tongue outside of the mouth, rolling it from the sides to form a tube. Inhale through the tube. Close the mouth and exhale through the nose. Make sure the breaths are slow, deep and comfortable.

Sitkari – Bring the teeth together lightly. Separate the lips so that the teeth are exposed. Fold the tongue so that it touches the soft palate in kechari mudra. If that is uncomfortable keep the tongue flat. Inhale slowly, through the teeth. Close the mouth and exhale slowly through the nose. Keep the breaths slow and relaxed.

Kaki Mudra – *Though this is a mudra we are including it here due to its cooling effect.*- Keep the eyes open and focus on the nosetip. Purse the lips into the shape of a beak. Relax the tongue and inhale through the lips. Close the lips and exhale through the nose. Let the breath be slow and relaxed.

- ॐ Cooling breath can be practiced in combination with other breathing practices such as Ujjayi and Bhramari. Either cooling breath can be practiced, whichever is most comfortable.

Benefits of Cooling breath

- Acidity such as heartburn
- Reduces high blood pressure

- Muscular relaxation
- Peptic or mouth ulcer
- Controls hunger or thirst, gives feelings of satisfaction
- Helpful for nausea
- Removes excess heat
- Allows prana to flow more freely through the body
- Can help cool the body, such as during hot weather or a hot flush
- Cools, calms and tranquilises the mind, in cases of anger or frustration
- Reduces emotional excitation
- Balances endocrine system
- Purifies the blood
- Useful to practice before going to sleep if one suffers from insomnia
- Sitkari has a beneficial effect on the teeth and gums which is beneficial during and after pregnancy when mouth health can be compromised.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Low blood pressure
- Asthma, respiratory disorders, excessive mucous, cold or flu
- Chronic constipation
- Avoid in a cold climate
- Avoid if one feels cold easily
- Addition for sitkari – sensitive teeth

Ujjayi – Victorious Breath

Focus the awareness on the throat. Imagine you are inhaling and exhaling through the throat. Start to contract the throat slightly on inhalation and exhalation. Keep the breath, slow, relaxed and deep. Focus on the breath and sound. The sound should not be very loud and will be like a baby snoring. The breath will become slower as one continues.

Benefits

- Decreases high blood pressure
- Activates the natural relaxation response
- Good for any heart problems
- Insomnia
- Mental tension, stress, anxiety, tranquilising effect
- Helpful for fluid retention
- Encourages introversion
- Increases psychic sensitivity and relaxes on a psychic level
- Stimulates parasympathetic nervous system and inducing muscular relaxation
- Useful preparation for meditation
- Helpful to balance the emotions
- Helpful during labour

Precautions and Contra-indications

- Very introverted people should avoid
- Low blood pressure
- Avoid contracting the throat too strongly, it should be relaxing and soothing.

Bhramari – Humming Bee Breath

Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose. On exhalation make the sound of 'm', as in the third letter of 'aum', like the humming sound of a bee. Exhale slowly and do not strain. The sound should be smooth, even and controlled. The exhalation will naturally be longer than the inhalation. Continue. If that is comfortable block the ears with the fingers to increase the vibrations through the body. One can block the ears by placing the thumbs in the ears and elbows pointing out, arms by the sides of the head and fingers around the head or by blocking the ears with the index fingers and elbows pointing down, arms in front of the chest.

If bhramari exhalation is comfortable one can start inhalation with 'm' sound. It is higher and more difficult to create but very beneficial and comes with practice. Again the sound should be slow and controlled, without strain. Ujjayi is a good alternative to the bhramari inhalation and can be substituted, or bhramari exhalation can be practiced with a normal inhalation.

Benefits

- Mental tension, anxiety, anger, stress.
- Insomnia, especially when done before bed
- Strengthens the throat and voice, useful for any throat problems
- High blood pressure
- For healing of body tissue after operation, useful postnatally
- Improves hearing
- Useful to practice postnatally when soothing a baby
- Allows one to become more introverted.
- Useful preparation for meditation.
- Can be helpful during labour
- Stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, inducing muscular relaxation
- Good for the thyroid'
- increases psychic sensitivity and awareness of subtle sound vibrations which is useful for Nada Meditation

Precautions & Contra-Indications

- Severe ear infections

Bhastrika – Bellow's Breath

One has to operate the lungs like bellows.

Take a deep breath in and breathe out forcefully through the nose. Do not strain. During inhalation the abdomen moves outward as the diaphragm descends and as one exhales the abdomen is pulled in. The movement should be slightly exaggerated. Do not expand the chest or raise the shoulders. There should be no jerk to the body. Continue with this type of breathing but increase the speed. This is basically fast breathing. After practicing one round inhale through the right nostril slowly and then exhale through the left nostril. This is one round.

**Note – 100 repetitions of kapalbhati can be done, before inhaling through the right nostril, instead of a round of fast breathing if preferred.*

Benefits

- Practice is ideal for purifying blood
- Improves complexion.
- Clears the air passages.

- Gives massage to the chest area.
- Warms the body up
- Used for reducing fats
- Speeds up the metabolism.
- Tones digestive system.
- Helps remove excess mucus, helpful when there is cough or cold.
- Helps to balance the doshas.
- Can be helpful during labour.
- Balances the nervous system.
- Brings focus and calmness.
- Gives energy.
- Helps with depression.
- Improves circulation to the heart and lungs.

Precautions & Contra-indications

If there is feeling of faintness, dizziness, excessive perspiration or a vomiting sensation it should be stopped immediately. It should not be stressful or uncomfortable to practice. The respiration, though exaggerated should still be calm. The face should remain relaxed and there should not be shaking of the body. One should build up slowly with bhastrika as it is a very powerful and dynamic practice. It should be avoided if there is too much heat in the body, high blood pressure, heart disease, recent abdominal surgery, stroke, eye problems, epilepsy, ulcer, acidity, headache, vertigo or menstruation.

Surya Bhedan –Right Nostril Breathing

Surya means sun, bheda means to pierce/awaken. In the body pingala nadi represents the energy of the Sun or vital energy, Surya bhedan therefore means to pierce or purify pingala nadi.

Inhale through the right nostril, exhale through the left nostril.

Benefits

- Increases vital energy in the body.
- Heats the body.
- Stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and the left part of the brain.
- Eliminates wind or gas related trouble (Vata) and
- Helps to balance mucus (Kapha)
- Helps to balance acidity (Pitta)

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, epilepsy, ulcer, acidity, hyperthyroidism, anxiety, headache or menstruation.

Cleansing Techniques

The hatha yoga cleansing processes have been placed into six groups of purification practices known as shatkarmas, 'Shat' meaning six and 'karma' meaning action. They are described in the ancient texts of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gherand Samhita. The six shatkarmas are neti, cleansing of the nasal passages, dhouti, cleansing of the alimentary canal, nauli, strengthening of the abdominal organs, basti, cleansing of the large intestine, kapalbhati, cleansing of the frontal area of the brain and tratak, intense gazing of a point developing concentration and cleansing the mind. A variety of practices come under these categories. We will look at the following cleansing practices that can be helpful for many problems.

- ॐ Bindu Tratak
- ॐ Jyoti Tratak
- ॐ Kapalbhati
- ॐ Agnisar Dhouti
- ॐ Jal Neti
- ॐ Danda Neti
- ॐ Vaman Dhouti
- ॐ Danda Dhouti
- ॐ Vastra Dhouti
- ॐ Lagoo Shankarprakshalan
- ॐ Poorna Shankarprakshalan

Tratak

This is concentrated gazing on a point, flame or object without blinking the eyes. It is a cleansing practice for both the eyes and the mind.



Bindu Tratak

The bindu, a dot, usually red or black should be placed on the wall at eye level and one should sit in front of it, at about an arms distance. Sit comfortably with the spine erect and eyes relaxed. First close the eyes and relax. Keep the body steady and stable throughout the practice. Open the eyes and gaze steadily at the point. Try not to blink or move the eyeballs, do not strain the eyes. Try to focus only on the point. When the eyes start to get tired or begin to water gently close them and gaze at the after image of the point in chidakash. When the image disappears open the eyes and repeat the process. Continue as many times as desired. After completing palm the eyes and if needed splash some cold water into the eyes.



Jyoti Tratak

Light the candle and sit as per bindu tratak, an arms length away from the candle which should be at eye level. Make sure there is no draft in the room so that the flame can remain steady. It is best practiced at night so that the room can be dark and the focus can be directed on the candle more easily. Follow the same procedure as bindu tratak but gaze at the tip of the wick, not the whole flame. Sometimes the flame may flicker but the wick will remain steady. Continue for as long as desired. Finish with palming and/or cold water.

Benefits

- Helps to remove suppressed thoughts and associated worries
- Makes the eyes clear and bright
- Cleanses the eyes
- Balances nervous system
- Relieves mental tension and anxiety
- Improves memory and concentration
- Decreases thoughts
- Helpful for depression
- Helps remove insomnia
- Strengthens will power
- Activates Ajna chakra
- Preparation for meditation.
- Curbs the changing and spontaneous tendency of the mind and channels it in one continuous stream, leading to one-pointedness.

Precautions & Contra-indications

The flames must be steady, there should be no draught and no strain of the eyes. Bindu tratak should be practiced instead of jyoti tratak for epileptics and those with eyestrain or eye problems. Good lighting should be there for bindu tratak. One should build up slowly with tratak due to its mental cleansing effects so that one doesn't become disturbed.

Duration

Beginners should start with a few minutes in total. Later it can be practiced for up to 15 minutes.

Kapalbhati – Frontal Lobe Cleansing

Kapalbhati is related to the breathing process but is classified under cleansing techniques.



First sit in any comfortable sitting position with the hands on the knees. Relax the body and breathe naturally. Bring the awareness to the breath and abdomen. Inhale deeply and exhale with a forceful, but never straining, contraction of the abdominal muscles. The next inhalation will occur passively as the abdominal muscles relax and expand. There should not be any effort to inhale. Continue with the active exhalation and passive inhalation, which is the opposite of what we normally do. If necessary have a break, breathe naturally and then continue.

Benefits

- Strengthens and exercises the muscles of the respiratory system
- Clears the air passages
- Increases the efficiency of the lungs
- Purifies the respiratory system
- Increases the supply of oxygen in the blood
- Purifies nadis
- Removes sensory distractions and energises the mind
- Strengthens the nervous system due to its action of reversing the breathing process.
- Improves digestion and metabolism
- Brings a state of lightness and clarity to the mind
- Removes sleepiness

Precautions & Contra-indications

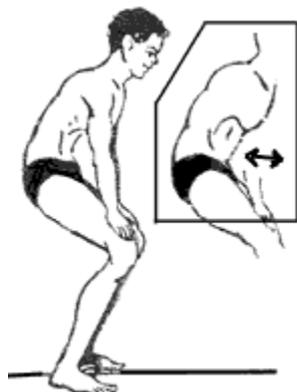
If there is any dizziness stop the practice and breathe naturally. Recommence when ready but with less force. If it continues seek guidance .Avoid if there are heart problems, high blood pressure, lung problems, recent abdominal surgery, stroke, vertigo, epilepsy during pregnancy and menstruation.

Duration

It is said that the ideal ration for kapalbhati is 120 repetitions per minute. Practicing faster than this is not advisable. If one cannot practice that speed they should do what is most comfortable for them.

The amount of repetitions can slowly be increased as per the individual's capacity and strength. One may start with 2 rounds of 20 repetitions and slowly build up to 2 rounds of 120 repetitions. After some time one can build up to 500 repetitions.

Agnisar Dhouti



Stand erect with a distance of 1 to 1.5 ft in between both the feet. Inhale. Bend the legs, place both the hands on the knees and exhale. The pressure of the shoulders should come onto the knees through both the hands. After exhaling completely contract the abdomen and bring it inwards, towards the spine. Immediately release the abdomen and continue the contraction and expansion in a rapid manner until you feel that you need to inhale. Stop the process and gradually inhale as you stand up, raising the arms upward and then exhaling lower the arms. This is one round. After completing as many rounds as desired lie down in shavasan and give a gentle clockwise massage to the abdomen.

Benefits

- Increases the circulation of blood to the digestive organs
- Removes impurities and improves the efficiency of all the organs.

- Digestion is improved and the agni or digestive fire is lit.
- The appetite is stimulated
- Removes digestive troubles
- Massages and strengthens the abdomen
- Increases prana in general and stimulates all 5 pranas in the body.
- Removes tiredness and depression.
- Helps remove fats
- The pancreas is given a good massage which helps with insulin production and therefore diabetes.
- Massages bladder

Precautions & Contra-indications

The movement of the stomach should not be jerky but should be done rhythmically. Avoid if there has been any abdominal surgery, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, diarrhoea, menstruation, hernia, pregnancy and acidity. Always practice on an empty stomach and if possible, empty bladder and bowels.

Duration

3-4 rounds can be practiced, slowly increasing the amount of repetitions per round. 100 strokes per practice is a good amount to aim for.

Jal Neti – Nasal Cleansing



In a jug mix 1 teaspoon of water with 500 mls of warm water. Fill the neti pot with water. Usually the neti pot holds 125mls. Bend the knees and place one hand on the knee. Tilt the head to the side and insert the spout into the upper nostril. Keep the mouth open and breathe naturally through it. The water will naturally flow out of the lower nostril. Sometimes a little water may flow down the throat or face. In this case adjust the position of the head. Everybody is different and when the correct position has been found then it becomes very easy. Once all the water from the pot has gone through the nostrils repeat on the other side. This can be practiced twice if the pot holds 125mls otherwise use 500 mls of water. After practicing it is important to dry the nostrils. To do this lean forward and swing the head in a half rotation from side to side, exhaling forcefully but without tension as the head moves downwards, inhaling as the head comes up. If you feel there is still some water inside then tilt the head forward for some time then try blowing your nose, remembering not to strain.

Benefits

- Helps to purify the breathing path right from the nostrils to the throat
- Removes mucus and pollution from the nasal cavities
- Helps in reducing allergies

- Helps to prevent colds and sinus problems
- Cleans the eyes and ears
- Improves nasal functions, sinuses and brain
- Awakens Ajna chakra

Precautions & Contra-indications

Those with blocked nostrils should not practice jal neti as it may cause a blockage of water inside the cavity. It is best as a preventative so instead practice when both nostrils are flowing. If you are prone to nose bleeding then again it is not recommended without advice. Placing a drop of warm ghee in each nostril before the practice can help. Also for some people they may have a structural blockage preventing the flow of water out of the other nostril. Ask your doctor about this.

Duration/Frequency

It can be practiced everyday if necessary but for a normal healthy individual once a week is adequate. If one has allergies then it can be practiced daily.

Danda Neti – Nasal Cleansing with Tube



Take a comfortable position, sitting or standing. Relax the body, breathe normally. Take your rubber tube and dip it in a few drops of ghee. Place the tube into one nostril. It is best to start with the nostril that is flowing first. Slowly and carefully continue to insert the tube. It will reach the nasal cavity and then one will be able to feel it in the throat. It is very important to go slowly here. Sometimes the tube will not go and one needs to gently twist the tube until the correct position is found. There should never be any pain or discomfort. When the tube reaches the throat insert the index and middle finger into the throat to hold onto the tube. It will be very slippery at this point and may take some time to get a hold of. It is important that the fingernails are not long so that they do not scratch the throat. Once the tube is held very gently move the tube to and fro, to gently clean, and then slowly remove the tube from the mouth. Repeat with the other nostril.

Benefits

- Same effects as jal neti
- Also increases the blood flow to nasal passages which makes the nose function better

- Has a friction effect which can be helpful if there are any fleshy outgrowths preventing the free flow of air.
- It helps with excess mucus/kapha so indirectly helps tonsillitis.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Don't practice is one has a deviated nasal septum or has nosebleeds. Always follow with jal neti to flush out any impurities or particles. It should always be practiced under guidance to begin with. There should never be any kind of pain or discomfort.

Duration/Frequency

Can be practiced weekly or if needed a few times a week.

Vaman Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing

Prepare warm salted water to the proportion of 2 teaspoons salt per litre of water. Prepare about 2 litres of water. Sit in a squatting position or sitting down. Start drinking the water at a continuous speed. Do not sip the water slowly and do not drink very fast. The aim is to drink 6-8 glasses of water for proper cleansing. If one only takes a few glasses then the effect will not be there. With each glass of water one will become a little slower in drinking as the stomach fills up. Sometimes some nausea will be felt, try to overcome that, take a few breaths and continue. When one's stomach is completely full and one feels they cannot take another sip then stand up, relax and press two fingers onto the back of the tongue. This pressure normally causes the water to be expelled automatically. Continue with this process until no more water can be expelled. If it is difficult to get the water up uddiyan bandha may be used. Take 10 minute shavasan. One can eat after 30 minutes.

Benefits

- Removes mucus from the stomach and also from the lungs
- Helps remove cough, cold or congestion.
- Helps to remove excess acid if there is acidity and helps to increase the secretions if there is low acid.
- Improves the function of the stomach.
- Improves appetite and digestion
- Helps with all acid related problems such as headaches and migraines.
- Helps to remove mental blockages and suppressed emotions.
- Removes fears
- Removes morning sickness in pregnancy but should only be practiced if they are used to it
- Tones abdominal organs

Precautions & Contra-indications

The fingernails should not be long as this may cause scratching of the throat. Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy (except first trimester), stomach ulcer, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach.

Duration/Frequency

One can practice weekly or monthly. If one is having a lot of congestion or acidity it can be practiced daily for up to a week.

Danda Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing with Tube



Drink 2 glasses of plain water. Find a comfortable sitting position, squatting is ideal. Relax the body and breathe normally. Open the mouth and slowly insert the tube into the throat. Slightly chew, to produce saliva and swallow. Slowly the tube will move down the throat towards the stomach. One may feel some retching as the body tries to throw out the tube. Try to overcome this reflex and continue. Do not push the tube down hard, let it move slowly and carefully. Once the tube reaches the stomach water may automatically come out of the tube. Stand up and bend forward slightly to allow the tube to pull out all the water from the stomach. Sometimes it can take a bit of time because the mucus can block the tube. Practicing uddiyan bandha can be helpful to increase the pressure of the water. When no more water is coming out very slowly start to remove the tube. Do not pull it. The oesophagus may try to pull the tube downward. Relax and do not worry. Breathe normally and continue to gently pull the tube upwards and out. Take shvasan for ten minutes.

Benefits

- The effect is similar to vaman but the benefits are more.
- Causes friction in the oesophagus and helps to stimulate the nerve plexus.
- It needs coordinated action of the three layers of oesophagus muscles, so improves oesophageal function.
- Helps remove excess mucus much more than vaman.
- Strong effect on the emotions, suppressed emotions, anxieties and fears.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy, stomach ulcer, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach. Avoid if the throat is sore.

Duration/Frequency

One can practice weekly or monthly.

Vastra Dhouti – Stomach Cleansing with Cloth



Get a cotton cloth that is 2.5 cm wide. The length can vary, one can start with one metre and build up to three metres. The cloth should be soft and have no loose threads. Boil the cloth. Remove the cloth from the water and place in a bowl with a little water covering it and if desired a bit of honey. Also get a glass of water to drink.

Take a sitting position, ideally squatting if comfortable. Relax, breathe normally. Take one end of the cloth and fold the corners to make a point. Place it in the back of the mouth and start chewing the cloth and swallowing. Sip the water. The cloth should slowly start to move down the throat. The chewing action will increase the saliva that helps the cloth glide downwards. The cloth may bunch up a little in the back of the throat so it is essential to keep drinking water. As the cloth starts moving down one may feel nausea or retching. Try to relax till the sensation passes. Continue. As the cloth passes down the sensation will decrease slightly. Keep swallowing the cloth till there is only 30 cms left. It is very important that the cloth is held tightly at the end so that it does not go down the throat. Next stand up and practice nauli or agnisar. Sit back down and very slowly start to pull the cloth out gently. The body may try to pull the cloth back down. Do not get stressed about this but continue to relax, breathe and slowly pull the cloth out. Never pull on the cloth. Once it is out take shavasana for ten minutes.

Benefits

- The autonomous nervous system is toned due to the person controlling the reflex urge to vomit.
- Removes mucus from the chest and stomach
- Cleans the stomach, removing toxins.
- Allows the bronchial tubes to relax which is beneficial for asthma
- Helps with cough
- Removes excess pitta.
- Improves the function of the stomach and oesophagus
- Removes bad breath
- Improves will power, focus and concentration

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy, stomach ulcer, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach. Avoid if the throat is sore.

Duration/Frequency

One can practice weekly or monthly.

Lagoo Shankarprakashalan – Partial Master Cleanse

This is the short version that can be practiced more frequently and without the restrictions that the master cleanse has.

To practice, prepare 2 litres of warm water, add 4 teaspoons of salt and a few squeezes of lemon. Sit down, relax and drink two glasses of the water. Try to drink continuously, not too slowly and not too fast. After drinking the water practice two sets of the exercises.

One set is as follows –

1. Tadasan – Palm Tree Pose – 6 x
2. Tiryak Tadasan – Swaying Palm Tree Pose – 6 x to each side
3. Kati Chakrasan – Waist Rotating Pose – 6 x to each side
4. Tiryak Bhujangasana – Twisted Cobra – 6 x to each side
5. Udarakarshanasan – Abdominal Stretch Pose – 6 x to each side
6. Kauva Chalsan – Crow Walking – one round of the mat

Again drink two glasses of water and practice two sets of exercise. Repeat this one more time. There should be a total of six glasses of water and six sets of exercise. Even four glasses and four sets can have a beneficial effect. After completing take at least 10 minutes of shavasana and wait for half an hour before eating. If one needs to go to the bathroom at any time one should do so. Some people will find that the water starts to come through before finishing the practice whilst others will find they have looser motions later in the day. If one has severe constipation then it may only soften the stools and the practice should be repeated the next day.

Benefits

- Very helpful for constipation
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- General cleansing of the digestive system
- Improves functioning and efficiency of all digestive organs
- Helps to flush out the kidneys
- Helps to improve bowel functioning

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy, stomach ulcer, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems, any abdominal surgery. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach. Avoid if feeling tired or weak.

Duration/Frequency

Can be practiced weekly or monthly or even daily for up to a week if one is suffering from severe constipation.

Poorna Shankarprakashalan – Full Master Cleanse

This practice takes physical and mental preparation. One should practice the sets of exercise, slowly building up, over a week. It is very important that this is practiced under the guidance of a yoga expert.

To practice prepare 4 litres of water as per lagoo shankarprakashalan. Sit down, relax and drink two glasses of the water. Try to drink continuously, not too slowly and not too fast. After drinking the water practice two sets of the exercises, as per lagoo shankarprakashalan. Again drink two glasses of water and practice two sets of exercise. Continue to repeat this process. It is helpful to make a chart to note down how many glasses of water have been consumed and how many sets of exercise practiced. This process will continue until one starts to have bowel movements. From this moment on one needs to be aware of what is in the toilet and let their supervisor know so that if needed the amount to drink or the sets of exercise can be changed, as needed. Unless specified by the supervisor one continues with the two glass, two set routine. Generally most people will need between 14-16 glasses of water, but some will need less, only 8-10, whilst other may need more than 20. One will start to go to pass movements more frequently. When one starts to pass brown water it is time to stop the practice. Eventually the remaining water inside will also come out and that will lead to almost clear water coming out. It is very important not to overdo it because if one drinks too much then it can be difficult to stop the motions.

When the practice is complete a one hour shavasan is needed. Please make sure that you DO NOT SLEEP as sleep will slow down the recovery process and may result in a cold or headache.

After shavasan one should feel very hungry. This is the time to eat khichadi, the porridge of rice and mung dal. Ghee is essential to be taken to coat the intestines which now have no lining. It should be taken until the body produces a new mucus lining. If ghee is not taken it will lead to many problems. One needs to eat plenty of khichadi, at least two bowlfuls, to fill the intestines so that they do not spasm and cramp due to the absence of bulk. Eat as much as you comfortably can. Avoid drinking water as this will start the motions again. If one is very thirsty take a sip and hold it in the mouth and then swallow. One can start drinking water 2 hours after finishing the practice but avoid drinking huge amounts to start. Take one glass and then wait half an hour before the next glass.

After eating rest and relax. One can now do yoga nidra and if wanted one can sleep. The rest of the day should be relaxing. There should be nothing strenuous. When one is hungry they should eat khichadi. Avoid going out in the sun. Avoid asanas.

The next day rest should be taken and strong asanas or exercise avoided. Khichadi should be taken but vegetables can be added.

Look below for what needs to be avoided after the practice.

Benefits

- Removes toxins from the blood
- Revitalises the entire digestive system
- Helpful for irritable bowel syndrome
- Removes indigestion, acidity and gases.
- Removes constipation
- Beneficial for obesity
- Good for diabetes
- Beneficial for gynaecological problems.

- Remove the mucus that may be in the digestive glands, improving enzyme production and therefore digestion.
- Removes excess blood sugar that causes diabetes. It has been found to be very useful for diabetes when combined with the partial cleanse.
- Improves both voluntary and involuntary muscle activity of intestines.
- Strengthens immunity
- Brings mental calmness
- Purifies the nadis, chakras and pranic body.
- In Gherand Samhita it says the body becomes like that of God, meaning energetic, charismatic, light and flexible body with concentrated pranic energies.

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there is high blood pressure, heart disease, menstruation, pregnancy, stomach ulcer, colitis, diarrhoea, hernia, stroke, eye problems, those under 16 years of age, any abdominal, spine, heart or brain surgery. One should practice in the morning, on an empty stomach. Avoid if feeling tired or weak. One needs to be physically and mentally strong for this practice.

Duration/Frequency

Only practice once in six months.

Points to Note During the Practice

- Please observe the silence during the process and focus on abdomen.
- While drinking the water, you should sit down and drink continuously but not fast.
- If you feel vomiting then stop the process temporarily and take a walk in shade focusing on breathing, resume the process when you are comfortable.
- Do not relax or do shavasana during the process as it will slow down the process of removing the water.
- If you feel giddiness or a headache then talk to the supervisor immediately.
- You can listen to relaxing music to keep your mind focused and relaxed during the process.
- Sometimes going to the toilet more than 8 times results in dehydration and weakness. Keep the supervisor updated with each trip to the toilet.
- Also do not exceed the point beyond which almost clear water is being passed. Otherwise the system may start producing bile and bright yellow water will be seen.
- In case of any problem contact the supervisor immediately.

Dietary Changes following the practice

- ॐ Avoid milk, milk products, and bakery products for three days.
- ॐ Avoid all chemically processed, preserved food, pungent, spicy, acidic and heavy to digest food for at least three weeks.
- ॐ Avoid non-vegetarian food for at least 40 days or preferably forever.
- ॐ Alcohol, tea, coffee, cigarettes, intoxicants and drugs avoid for at least 40 days or preferably forever.
- ॐ All fruits especially acidic fruits such as lemons, grapefruit, oranges and pineapples should be avoided for three days.
- ॐ The dinner should be same as the lunch. Take the second meal about 6 hours after the first meal or earlier if one feels hungry. The stomach must be filled to its capacity at both meals even if there is no hunger.

Other Recommendations for Purifying the Body

As well as the yogic cleansing techniques there are some other recommendations to take into consideration when trying to purify the body. A natural, wholefood, preferably vegetarian, diet full of fresh fruit and vegetables, both raw and cooked, whole grains, lentils, legumes, nuts and seeds. Try to fill between half to two thirds of the diet with fruit and vegetables. Avoid salt, sugar, saturated fats, fried and fast foods, alcohol, caffeine and cigarettes.

Make sure you drink enough fluids. If you are eating lots of fresh fruits and vegetables then the fluids needed are less. Don't drink just to complete the daily two litres of water like many books say. It is important to listen to the body. It tells you when it needs water and you can also check your urine so you will know if the amount you are drinking is sufficient. The urine should be a very pale yellow. If you drink too much water it can lead to loss of electrolytes as well as water retention.

Once a week have a fruit and vegetable fast, eating only fresh fruit and steamed or raw vegetables. It gives the digestive system a little break and will also help to clear any old waste. Drink warm water with lemon or herbal teas. If you find it difficult to do this all day then substitute just one meal with fruits and vegetables.

Regular exercise is also important, whether it is sun salutations as exercise or walking, swimming or other forms of exercise.

Dry skin brushing is very good for improving the circulation, getting rid of cellulite and toxins as well as dead skin cells, leaving the skin glowing. All you need to do is get a body brush and brush the body in circular motions from the feet and arms towards the heart before you take your shower.

Self massage is also good for improving the circulation, skin appearance and is soothing and relaxing for the mind. After dry skin brushing massage any cold pressed vegetable oil into the skin, first warming it with the hands. Massage in upward strokes towards the heart.

There are so many ways to cleanse and detoxify the body and it is becoming increasingly necessary to do this both for our body and mind. By following a yogic lifestyle we can remain happy, healthy and free of disease.

Bandhas

A bandha may be defined as a particular action involving pressure or strain on the muscles. It is expected in Yoga to retain a firm pose in a bandha as it is retained in the asanas. The bandhas are to be studied mainly while studying pranayama but they also have their own individual effects. Bandha means to lock, hold or tighten and aims to lock and move prana in particular areas.

- ॐ Jalandhar Bandha
- ॐ Moola Bandha
- ॐ Uddiyan Bandha

Jalandhar Bandha – Chin Lock

Introduction

It is difficult to explain why this bandh is known as Jalandhar *Bandha*. However, one may guess that Rishi Jalandhar might have defined the act of this bandha for the first time, and it was therefore named after him.

If we try to trace the meaning of the word Jalandhar, "Jal" means "Net", in this case, net of Nadis (energy channels) and the word "Dhar" means to hold the flow of the fluid (Amrut), flowing through the nadis.



This bandha can be achieved without getting into any asana pose but generally it is practiced in Padmasana or Siddhasana but any other meditative asana can be used.

Practicing the Bandha

- ॐ In the meditative asana have the hands in either drone or dhyana mudra. Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose.
- ॐ Contract the throat as if you are swallowing.
- ॐ Bring the chin back towards the spine and gently press downward. It does not have to be a strong bend. Over time one will feel the compression of the windpipe.
- ॐ Hold the bandha for as long as it is comfortable, then relax the throat, raise the chin and exhale slowly through the nose.
- ॐ Repeat as many times as desired.

Anatomical focus

Throat, neck

Awareness

Vishuddhi chakra, mental calmness, introversion

Do

- Contract the throat. Contraction is similar to what is done in ujjayi pranayama.
- Slightly bend the neck forward but avoid excessive bending of neck.
- Check if you are doing it correctly by trying to talk. If you cannot talk then the bandha is correct and you are preventing the flow of air out of the body.

Don't

- Contract so strongly that it is painful. This bandha should be relaxing and calming.
- Hold the air inside for too long, build up over time.

Benefits

- This bandha is the most important in practice of pranayama with breath retention. If one cannot practice Jalandhar bandha correctly then one cannot do pranayama. This is preparation for tribandha.
- The pressure of the bandha slows the blood supply to the carotid artery which sends a signal to the brain to balance the blood pressure, preventing it from increasing, which can occur in breath retention.
- This bandha stimulates vagus nerve, which is a parasympathetic nerve. This is stimulating parasympathetic nervous system. Blood pressure, heart rate slows down. Muscles are more relaxed, and it creates calmness in the mind and removal of thoughts
- Improves blood supply to the cervical region of the spine.
- Prevents air from entering the eustachian tubes which causes pressure on the ear drums.
- Good for thyroid gland especially hypo thyroid. It has good effect on regulation of metabolism.
- Prevention of coughs, throat problems, it is good for vocal chords.
- Induces introversion.

Benefits for Women

- Emotional tension related to menstrual cycle

Therapeutic Applications

- Thyroid problems
- Stress & anxiety

Precautions & Contra-indications

- high or low blood pressure,
- cervical spondylitis or any neck pain,
- Intracranial pressure, vertigo or any heart disease.
- Practice with caution for hyperactive thyroid problems.

Duration

Beginners can practice from 4 seconds and slowly increase the time duration as per comfort. In the beginning doing 3 to 5 repetitions and then increasing repetitions as per comfort.

Variations & Tips

- ॐ Some people like to have their hands in drone mudra and arms straight. This causes a hunch in the shoulders but can help improve the Jalandhar *bandha*.
- ॐ For those who find it hard to achieve the lock one can practice by inhaling with ujjayi, this helps one to understand and start the contraction of the throat.

Preparatory Practices

- ॐ Deep breathing and/or ujjayi breathing

Follow Up Poses

- ॐ Samyakasan – where the hands are placed behind the body and the head is tilted back to stretch the throat.

References in the ancient texts

Jalandhar *Bandha* has been described in Hatha Yoga Pradipika in the third chapter :

Kanthamakunchya hridaye sthapayechhibukam dridham |
Bandho jalandharakhyoyam jaramrituvinashakah || H P 3-70
Badhnani hi shirajalam adhogami nabhojalam |
Tato jalandharo badhah kanthadukkhahoghanashanah || H P 3-71

Meaning -

The chin is to be pressed on the chest after contracting the throat. This *bandha* eliminates old age and death. The contracted veins in the throat ensure that the liquid from the skies is received here. Hence, the *bandha* has been appropriately known as Jalandhar *Bandha*, which means that it destroys any pain in the throat.

Gherands Samhita has also described the *bandha* :

Kanthasankochanam krutva chibukam hridaye nyaset |
Jalandharakrute bandhe shodashadhar*bandhanam* |
Jalandharam mahamudra mrityoeach kshayakarini || G S 3-12

Meaning -

The chin is to be pressed onto the heart after contracting the throat. This Jalandhar Bandh supports sixteen types of *bandhas* and destroys death.

Siddham jalandharam *bandham* yoginam siddhidayakam |
Shanmasmabyaset yo hi sa siddho natra samshayah || G S 3-13

Meaning -

Jalandhar Bandh is Swayamsiddha and the sadhaka who practises this *bandha* for six months will, no doubt, achieve siddha status.

In both the texts, the description as well as the effects of the *bandha* is more or less the same. Both the texts have assured that the *bandha* causes destruction of old age and death. Observing this *bandha* gives peace and calmness to both the heart and the mind. This in turn increases the lifetime of the sadhaka.

Moola Bandha – Root Lock

Introduction

This bandha relates to mooladhara chakra and is termed as moola bandha. Moola means root or source.

This bandha is best performed in siddhasana as it helps give an automatic Moola Bandha and creates more awareness in this region. If siddhasana is difficult then one can sit in Padmasana or any other meditative asana.

Practicing the Bandha

- ॐ In the sitting position close your eyes, relax and become aware of the area which is the trigger point for mooladhara chakra. For men it is the perineal area, between the anus and genitals. One must concentrate on that area and just slightly in, about 1 cm, is the trigger point. For women the place is at the point of the cervix, where the uterus joins the vagina. The perineal muscles are also used. It can be very difficult to isolate these points as there is a tendency to also contract the anal and urinary sphincters. Over time one learns how to isolate the muscles.
- ॐ There are a few ways to practice. One can just concentrate on this area, breathe normally and contract and relax as many times as is comfortable.
- ॐ Another way is to inhale and contract, hold for a few seconds, and then exhale, relaxing. Repeating as per comfort.
- ॐ Another is to contract, breathe normally and hold the bandha for as long as one can, then slowly release.
- ॐ This bandha can also be practiced in certain balancing asanas to improve balance.
- ॐ It is also beneficial if one contracts and pulls upward slightly.

Anatomical focus

Perineal area or cervix.

Awareness

Mooladhara chakra

Do

- Try to relax as much as possible
- Keep focused on the point

Don't

- Hold too long if it's not comfortable
- Have any kind of strain

Benefits

- Stimulates pranic energy
- Tones the reproductive, urinary and excretory systems
- Realigns the panchkoshas
- Tones the pelvic nerves
- Helps one to have sexual control
- Helps redirect sexual energy so it can be used for other purposes
- Can awaken mooladhara chakra
- Can help remove fears and take one out of depression

- Prevents urinary incontinence
- Removes fatigue
- Redirects energy in the upward direction.
- Preparation for *tribandha* and pranayama.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive system and helps regulate the menstrual cycle
- Helps to remove congestive period pain
- Stimulates prana in the pelvic region, promoting health
- Strengthens the pelvic muscles which is helpful during pregnancy
- Post natally it tones and strengthens the pelvic floor muscles, speeding up recovery.

Therapeutic Applications

- Menstrual disorders
- Period pain – practiced throughout the month
- Infertility
- Depression

Precautions & Contra-indications

- Avoid during menstruation or if there is any pain when practicing.
- Avoid if there is chronic constipation.
- Be cautious if one has haemorrhoids.

Duration

As many times as is comfortable. The bandha can also be held for up to 5 minutes over time.

Variations & Tips

- If siddhasan is difficult one can slightly bring the foot under the thigh and move the body forward so that the heel more easily presses against the body and improves the moola bandha.

Preparatory Poses

Siddhasan

Follow Up Practices

Tribandha and pranayam

References in the ancient texts

The bandha has been described thoroughly in the third chapter of Hatha Pradipika.

Parshnibhagen sampeedya yonimakunchayet gudam |
Apanmurdhwamakrushya mulbandhobhidhiyate ||
3-61

Meaning -

The heel should press the perineum, the muscles should be contracted and the gas (apan vayu) should be lifted upwards. This results in moola *bandha*. Further it is described as:

Adhogatimapan va urdhwargam kurute balat |
Aakunchanen tam prahurmulbandham hi yoginah || 3-62
Parnapanou nadbindu mulbandhen chaikatam |

Gatva yogasya samsiddhidam gachshato natra samshayah || 3-63

Meaning -

Apan vayu is generally in the downward direction. With deliberate contraction the apan vayu is lifted upwards. This is known as moola *bandha*. The *bandha* is to be performed till the time the gas is forced upwards. Hatha Yoga Pradipika, in further shlokas, describe this *bandha* as when the prana, apan, the sound and the point (nad and bindu) will merge with each other due to this *bandha*, then one can be said to succeed in yoga.

The effects of this bandh are described as under:

Apanpranayoraikyam kshayo mutrapurishayoh |
Yuva bhavati vrudhopi satatam mulbandhanat || 3-65

Meaning -

The regular study of moola *bandha* results in merging apan and prana. The excretions are minimised and an old person turns into a young one. Though, as a matter of practice, an old person may not be transformed into a youth, the general meaning can be guessed as the disappearance of the signs of old age with return of the enthusiasm of youth.

The next four shlokas in Hatha Yoga Pradipika describe how the *bandha* is related to awakening of Kundalini power. Hatha Yoga Pradipika says that when the apan vayu is forced upwards it enters the vanhimandal. The pressure of this vayu results in increasing the fire. Apan vayu and this fire heat the prana. This results in igniting the fire in the stomach. The kundalini power, which is supposed to be asleep, awakens like a snake hit by a stick. It then enters the sushumna nadi (brahma nadi) like a snake entering its hole. Hence, every sadhaka must study moola *bandha* regularly.

The thirteenth shloka in the third chapter of Gherand Samhita describes this *bandha*. The description is as given above as in Hatha Yoga Pradipika.

However, the effects of this bandh are described as:

Mulbandhah paro bandho jaramarannashanah |
Prasadadasya bandhasya sadhayetsarvavanchitam || 3-18

Meaning –

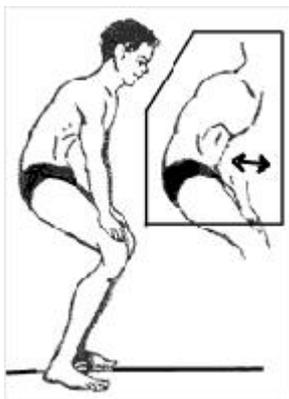
This is a superior type of *bandha* which results in reversal of old age and the death. The study of this *bandha* results in fulfilment of any desire. This description is a bit exaggerated but one can understand its importance on health.

Uddiyan Bandha – Abdominal Lock

Introduction

This bandha or lock involves the movement of the muscles of the abdomen and especially the diaphragm. Hatha Yoga assigns a special importance to Uddiyan Bandha and the study of pranayama is not complete without studying this lock. While performing this lock the muscles of the diaphragm are pulled in an upward direction; Uddiyan in Sanskrit is moving up hence this bandha is termed as Uddiyan Bandha. This lock is also useful for awakening of Kundalini Shakti which is another reason the name is there, for raising the energy upward.

The lock involves the action of the muscles of the abdomen and hence it may be performed while in a standing pose or sitting pose. The bandha can also be performed in Padmasana, Siddhasana, Vajrasana or any other meditative asana. However for best results, and especially when learning, it is best to perform the lock in a standing position.



Practicing the Bandha

- ॐ Stand with a distance of 1 to 1.5 feet between the legs.
- ॐ Bend the knees as if one is about to sit in a chair and place the palms firmly on the knees. The pressure should be on the arms so that the abdomen can relax.
- ॐ Bend the shoulders a little towards the front and the neck slightly downward.
- ॐ Inhale deeply and then exhale either through the nose or mouth. While exhaling, try to pull the muscles of the abdomen inwards. Lift up the ribs a little bit and pull the muscles from within with a gentle push upwards. The muscles of the abdomen must be relaxed at this time, so that they can be pushed up. These results in the muscles of the diaphragm

being pushed upwards and a vacuum created in abdomen. This is the final stage of Uddiyan Bandha.

- ॐ Try to remain firmly in this pose for as long as one can hold the breath out comfortably.
- ॐ When one needs to inhale slowly release the bandha by releasing the muscles of the abdomen back to the normal position. The diaphragm will also be restored to its normal position.
- ॐ Relax the strain in the shoulders and neck area and start inhaling gradually.
- ॐ After inhaling completely, bring the arms by the side and straighten the legs.
- ॐ Optional but strongly recommended – after completion of Uddiyan bandha lie in shavasana and very gently press the abdomen, in the direction of the large intestine. This helps to relax the abdomen.

Variation – when releasing the bandha one may inhale, raising the arms up over the head and exhaling lowering the arms down. This can be helpful if there is any tension in the neck.

Anatomical focus

Abdomen being pulled in and up

Awareness

Manipura chakra, Navel region, external breath retention, relaxation, stillness

Do

- Try to relax as much as possible to hold the bandha longer
- Have a slight hunch in upper back

- Bend neck forward like Jalandhar bandha, but not contracting the throat.

Don't

- Have any strain
- Hold so long that there is tension in the throat, resulting in coughing

Benefits

- The muscles of the diaphragm are well exercised and this movement therefore helps improve breathing.
- The organs in the abdomen develop a negative pressure. Due to this pressure, the blood supply to these organs is improved. The difference between the negative pressure during this bandh and the normal pressures resumed after relaxation increases friction on the internal organs such as the stomach, small intestines, liver and pancreas thereby improving their efficiency. This also results in improving the secretion of the digestive juices, improving the digestive function.
- It is stated in various ancient texts that apart from these benefits, the bandh is also useful for spiritual progress and awakening of Kundalini power.
- It is very important for practice this bandha independently as a preparation for tribandha and pranayama.
- Stimulates the digestive fire and appetite is stimulated,
- Tones liver, pancreas, adrenals, urinary and excretory systems. Removes impurities and improves the efficiency of all the organs.
- Excellent practice for helping depression, also removes fatigue and lethargy.
- Stimulates vagus nerve which is stimulation to parasympathetic nervous system and that brings mental, physical relaxation and peace.
- Improves blood supply throughout the whole torso
- Reverses the flow of apana and prana, causing union with samana and maipur chakra.
- Stimulation of manipur chakra, the energy distribution centre, increases pranic energy.
- Balances all 5 pranas in the body.

Benefits for Women

- Tones the reproductive organs
- Regulates the menstrual cycle.

Therapeutic Applications

- Diabetes
- Low appetite
- Weight loss
- Poor digestion and malabsorption
- Flatulence
- Depression, stress and anxiety
- Reproductive problems

Precautions & Contra-indications

Avoid if there has been any abdominal surgery, high blood pressure, heart disease, ulcers, diarrhoea, menstruation, hernia, intracranial pressure, glaucoma, pregnancy or acidity. Always practice on an empty stomach and if possible, empty bladder and bowels.

Duration

3-5 rounds can be practiced, holding for 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable. Slowly the time duration can be increased up to 1 minute.

Variations & Tips

- Sometimes making a false inhalation by trying to expand the chest as if one is breathing in Uddiyan bandha can help improve the bandha as it helps to pull the diaphragm upwards.

Preparatory Poses

Agnisar Dhouti

Follow Up Poses

Tribandha and pranayam

References in the ancient texts

The third chapter in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika describes ten mudras. *Uddiyan* bandh has been described as one of the mudras. The writer of Hatha Yoga Pradipika explains why this mudra is termed as *Uddiyan bandha* as follows :

Badhho yen sushumnyam pranastuddiyate yatah |
Tasmad*Uddiyan*akhyoyam yogibhihi samudahrutah || 3-55

Meaning –

The prana in the body is raised due to the performance of this *bandha*, hence this *bandha* is termed as *Uddiyan bandha*.

The action of this bandh is described below :

Udare paschimam tanam nabherudhwaram cha karayet
*Uddiyan*o hyasou bandho mrityumatang kesari || 3-57

Meaning –

The abdomen is to be pulled (stretched) inwards and the navel upwards. This process is known as *Uddiyan bandha*. This action is like a lion killing an elephant which represents death. Nowhere in the process is it described that the *bandha* is to be performed after exhalation. This part was taught as a matter of master–disciple tradition and hence perhaps not explained in detail in the shloka.

The effects of this bandh have been described below:

*Uddiyan*am tu sahajam gurunam kathitam sada |
Abhyasetsatam yastu vrudhohi tarunayate || 3-58

Meaning –

If the *bandha* is practised constantly and regularly as taught by the Guru, even an old man can be reverted into a young one. The effects have been a bit exaggerated however the hidden meaning is to be understood. The *bandha* causes certain beneficial effects on the body, which in turn result in a youth like state of the body, full of enthusiasm.

The next shloka describes:

Nabherurdhwamadhaschapi tanam kuryatprayatnatah |

Meaning –

If a sadhaka practices stretching the navel, the portion below the navel and the upper part of the abdomen towards the back and upward direction regularly for a period of six months, there is no doubt that he can win over death. This description is also a bit exaggerated however the logic behind it must be understood. We should not blindly believe that practising this bandah for six months will win over the death, but we should still practice this *bandha* regularly so that its beneficial effects on the body will result in increasing our life span. A shloka after this describes that the study of this *bandha* results in leading the sadhaka easily onto the path of mukti (liberation).

Mudras

Mudras translate as gestures. They are physical positions of the whole body or parts of the body such as the hands which subtly alter the flow of prana, deepening the awareness and altering the mood. They may be practiced alone or in combination with certain asanas. Hand mudras can be used during pranayama and meditation.

- ॐ Agochari Mudra – Nose Tip Gazing
- ॐ Ashwini Mudra –Horse Gesture
- ॐ Kaki Mudra – Crow Gesture
- ॐ Khechari Mudra – Tongue Gesture
- ॐ Maha Mudra – Great Psychic Attitude
- ॐ Manduki Mudra – Frog Gesture
- ॐ Prana Invocation Mudra
- ॐ Shambhavi Mudra – Eyebrow Centre Gazing
- ॐ Shanmukhi Mudra – Closing the Seven Gates
- ॐ Vipariti Karni Mudra – Inverted Psychic Attitude

Hand Mudras

- ॐ Dhyana Mudra – Meditation Gesture
- ॐ Bhairavi Mudra – Shiva Gesture
- ॐ Hridaya Mudra – Heart Gesture
- ॐ Jnana Mudra – Knowledge Gesture
- ॐ Prana Mudra – Energy Gesture
- ॐ Yoni Mudra – Womb Gesture

Agochari Mudra - also called Nasikagra Drishti (Nosetip Gazing)

Agocharam - beyond sensory perception, unknown or invisible

Nasi – nose

Agra - tip

Drishti – gazing



ॐ Sit in a meditative asana with the hands in dhyana mudra. Close your eyes. Relax the body. Open the eyes and become aware of the tip of the nose. You should be able to see inverted V. If this is not visible, you can start with a finger on the tip to get the focus right (a red dot on the tip of the nose can also be used to gain focus). Concentrate on this point for about 10 seconds. Breathe normally. Close your eyes again. Warm up your hands and cover your eyes to relax the eyes. Continue the practice for a few minutes.

Benefits

- Good for calming and stability of the mind as well as stress relief.
- Eyes become strong and introspection is created.
- Control over pranic energy
- Awakening and balancing of mooladhara chakra.

Precautions

- Do not over strain the eyes. Do not overdo the exercise as nausea might be felt and if it's done for too long one may get a headache.

Ashwini Mudra – Horse Gesture

- ॐ This practice is also practiced in a variation of Sarvangasan – shoulder stand pose.
- ॐ In a sitting position or an asana such as tadagasana become aware of the anal sphincter. Breathing normally contract and relax the anus, holding for up to ten seconds if comfortable. Practice for a few minutes or until tired. Make sure the contraction and relaxation is smooth and without strain.

Benefits

- Preparation for moola bandha.
- Strengthens the muscles of the anus.
- Helping to prevent anal incontinence.
- Helps prevent constipation and haemorrhoids.
- Helps to prevent prolapse of the rectum or uterus.
- Helpful in pregnancy due to the above.
- Helpful in postnatal recovery.
- Prevents dissipation of prana.
- Practicing in sitting position is a good alternative if one cannot practice sarvangasan for whatever reason eg. Pregnancy, high blood pressure etc,

Kaki Mudra – Crow Gesture

Kaki - crow



- ॐ Sit in a meditative asana with the hands in chin or jnana mudra.
- ॐ Make the mouth into a beak, with the tongue rounded, as in shitali.
- ॐ Inhale slowly and fully. (It can be combined with Agochari and looking at the nose while inhaling).
- ॐ Exhale while closing the eyes.
- ॐ Repeat for a few minutes.

Benefits

- Stimulates digestive system. It is said that 'your digestion system becomes like that of a crow'.
- This mudra is good for removing age related symptoms. It will make you young.
- Cools the body.
- Calms the mind and release tensions.

Precautions

- Do not practice if there is glaucoma, low blood pressure, cough or cold.
- For diabetic retinopathy or recent eye operation one should consult an expert before practicing.

Khechari Mudra – Tongue Gesture

- ॐ Sit in siddhasana, or any other comfortable meditative position.
- ॐ Turn the tongue to touch the back of the palate. Breathe normally.

Variation - This can be performed in Viparit Karni - Inverted Pose.

Benefits

- ॐ Good for thyroid
- ॐ Strengthens the digestive system as it stimulates certain hormones and saliva.
- ॐ Hunger and thirst are reduced.
- ॐ When performed in inverted pose, it retains ojas (life nectar).
- ॐ Improves meditation.
- ॐ Good for sinus problems.
- ॐ Awakens kundalini.

Precautions

Mouth ailments may stop one from practicing this mudra.

Maha Mudra – Great Psychic Attitude



ॐ From sitting position, bend the left leg and sit on the heel. Keep the right leg out in front.

ॐ Hold toes of the right leg with both hands and keep the head facing forward.

ॐ Inhale with kaki and agochari mudra and bend the head a bit further back.

ॐ Hold the breath for as long as comfortable while applying khechari and shambhavi mudra, as well as moola bandha.

ॐ Exhale, close your eyes and straighten your upper body.

ॐ Practice from the other side

ॐ Practice a few rounds from both sides.

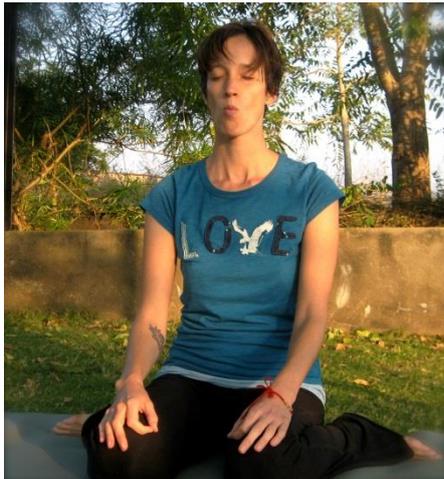
Benefits

- Increases pranic energy.
- Removes energy blockages.
- Creates heat in the body.

Precautions

- High blood pressure or heart complaints.
- If eye diseases or recent eye operations, do not practice without an experts opinion.
- Avoid during menstruation and pregnancy.

Manduki mudra - Frog Gesture



ॐ Sit in vajrasana with the heels on either sides of the buttocks and the toes pointing outwards. If this is uncomfortable then sit in vajrasana. Place the hands on the knees. Close the eyes and relax.

ॐ Move the tongue in front of the teeth with the mouth closed. The jaw should be relaxed. Start by moving the tongue to the left, right, up and down. Do this three times. Then rotate the tongue three times clockwise and three times anti-clockwise while touching the tongue to the mouth.

Benefits

- Mooladhara chakra is stimulated and the pranic energy flow is balanced.
- Good for the digestion, increases appetite, as it increases saliva.
- Face looks more attractive as the muscles of the face are relaxed.
- Good for anti-ageing and for delayed growth of grey hair.
- Good for throat and makes the tongue strong.
- Affects the sense of taste and creates a divine sense of smell.
- Stretches ankle, knees and hips.

Precautions

- Perform with caution if there are problems with the ankles, knees or hips.

Prana Invocation Mudra



- ॐ In a sitting position bring the hands in front of the lower belly, fingertips pointing towards each other, hands a little away from the body. Inhaling slowly bring the hands up over the belly, in front of the chest and up to the throat. Make sure not to touch the body. Holding the breath raise the arms up over the head, looking upwards then bring the hands back to the throat and exhaling slowly lower the hands down. Try to visualize and feel the movement of the prana moving up and down. Use ujjayi breathing if desired. When the arms are open focus on ajna chakra (the eyebrow centre) and sahasrara chakra (top of the head). Feel the prana entering the body. After practicing at least 7 times bring the hands in front of the body, palms facing each other and at a distance of 10-15 cms. Move the hands and try to feel the prana then place the hands on any part of the body to give more prana. Best to practice after pranayama.

Benefits

- Stimulates the prana within our body
- Helps distribute prana in our body and to particular areas
- Increases awareness of energy within our body
- Creates peace, calmness and contentment.
- Increases trust and connection in oneself and the universe

Shambhavi mudra – also called Bhrumadhya Drishti - Eyebrow Centre Gazing

Shambhavi – Wife of Shiva or Shakti

Bhru – eye

Madhya – centre

Drishti - gazing



ॐ Sit in padmasan, siddhasan, or in any other meditative position with hands in dhyana mudra. Close the eyes and relax the body.

ॐ Open the eyes and focus on the eyebrow centre. A big V should be seen. If the V is distorted one eye might not be focusing properly, this might be due to flexibility of the eyes. Fully concentrate on this point for about 10 seconds. Do not strain the eyes. Close the eyes if there is any discomfort.

ॐ Close your eyes. Warm up the hands and cover the eyes to relax the eyes.

ॐ Repeat the practice for a few minutes.

Benefits

- Good for stress relief and concentration of the mind.
- Strengthens the eyes.
- Awakening of Ajna chakra

Precautions

- Do not practice if there is glaucoma. If there are any major eye problems consult with an expert before practicing.

Shanmukhi Mudra – Closing the Seven Gates

Shat - six

Mukhi - openings



ॐ Sit in siddhasan or any comfortable sitting position.

ॐ Inhale, while performing kaki mudra as well as agochari mudra.

ॐ Hold the breath, close the eyes, and cover the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers and the nose with the middle fingers. Press the upper lip slightly over the bottom lip with the ring and little fingers. Keep your focus on ajna chakra. (Moolha banda can be applied).

ॐ Remove the hands from the face and exhale with brahmari.

ॐ Inhale straight away again and practice these rounds for a few minutes.

Benefits

- Useful for managing anxiety and removing negative mental patterns.
- Ajna chakra is stimulated.
- Stimulates sensory organs and later stages sense withdrawal.
- Brings about calmness, focus and introversion.
- Increases sensitivity to subtle stimuli.
- Great for facial muscles and appearance as the heat and prana of the hands and fingers stimulates and relaxes facial muscles.
- Creates balance between the materialistic and spiritual aspects.

Precautions

- If any pain is felt from performing the agochari mudra then avoid.
- Place the fingers gently on the face.
- For some people it can bring up strong emotions very fast and sometimes fear.

Viparit Karani Mudra - Inverted Psychic Attitude



ॐ Come into viparit karani pose. Close your eyes.

ॐ First focus on breathing with ujjayi breath.

ॐ Then focus on abdominal breathing.

ॐ Move on to awareness of the following chakras: vishuddi and manipura. Apply jiva bandha (tongue to top palate) or khechari mudra for the whole practice of viparita karani mudra.

ॐ While inhaling move awareness from manipura to vishuddi chakra and while exhaling move the awareness from vishuddhi to Manipur chakra. Continue with this movement 21 times.

ॐ Then move the awareness to the navel region, to the abdominal breathing and to manipura chakra.

ॐ Keep breathing with ujjayi and with abdominal breathing throughout the practice.

Benefits

- Stimulates the vishuddhi and manipur chakra and all the benefits of viparit karani practiced as an asana.
- Creates sublimation of energy (from bottom to top of the body) and balances the pranic flow of energy.
- Good for balancing the mind.

Precautions

- High blood pressure, heart disease, neck or back pain. As per viparit karni, the asana.

Bhairava Mudra – Shiva Gesture



ॐ Place the left hand under the belly, palm facing upwards. Place the right hand on top, palm facing upwards. Let the arms be relaxed and hands rest in the lap.

Benefits

- Balances left and right energies
- Creates mental stability and focus

Dhyana Mudra – Meditation Gesture



ॐ Place the hands on the knees. Turn the palms upward and touch the thumb to the top of the index finger. Let the fingers be relaxed.

Benefits

- Used for concentration of mind, peaceful state of mind. It prevents energy dissipation.
- Stimulates mooladhara chakra
- Gives lightness and openness to receiving

Hridaya Mudra – Heart Gesture



ॐ Place the hands on the knees, palms facing upwards. Bend the index finger and place it at the base of the thumb. One should be able to feel the pulse. Touch the thumb to the middle and ring fingers. Let the little finger be relaxed.

Benefits

- Helps redirect prana towards the heart, balancing the blood pressure and helping with heart problems.
- Helps open the heart on a pranic and emotional level, releasing emotions and tensions.

Jnana Mudra – Knowledge Gesture



ॐ Place the hands on the knees. Turn the palms downward and touch the thumb to the top of the index finger. Let the fingers be relaxed.

Benefits

- Used for concentration of mind, peaceful state of mind. It prevents energy dissipation.
- Stimulates mooladhara chakra
- Increases introversion

Prana Mudra – Energy Gesture



ॐ Place the hands on the knees. Turn the palms downward and touch the thumb to the ring and little fingers. Let the fingers be relaxed.

Benefits

- Increases energy and prana in the body
- Useful when there is tiredness or fatigue however avoid practicing before bed

Yoni Mudra – Womb Gesture



ॐ Bring the hands to the lap. Interlock the middle, ring and little fingers together. Press the thumbs and index fingers together. Move the thumbs and index fingers away from each other, forming a diamond shape.

Benefits

- Balances the left and right energies
- Gives mental stability and improves focus
- Increases prana and prevents dissipation
- Invokes the primal energy in the mooladhar chakra

Movements for Knee Problems

There are many movements that can be done to help strengthen and stabilize the knees, as well as improving flexibility. All of these movements should be practiced with awareness of the knees. Some of these movements have been covered in other chapters. They include -

- ॐ Knee Movement Type 1
- ॐ Knee Movement Type 2
- ॐ Knee Movement Type 3
- ॐ Ardha Chakrasan –
 - Type A – feet on floor
 - Type B – one leg raised
 - Type C – one leg raised and other heel raised
- ॐ Ardha Pawanmuktasan and Poorna Pawanmuktasan
- ॐ Foot stretching - feet together 10 x each way
- ॐ Foot stretching – alternate forward and back 10 x each way
- ॐ Ankles together and rotate – clockwise and anticlockwise 10 x each way
- ॐ Knee contraction
- ॐ Leg movement type 1 in sitting position - one leg, two legs
- ॐ Knee rotation in sitting 10 x clockwise, 10 x anticlockwise'
- ॐ Tadasan 10 x
- ॐ Kati chakrasan 10 x
- ॐ Mrudunga Bandha as a movement (straightening legs then bending the knees)

The remaining movements include -

Titaliasan as a Movement

- From titaliasan hold the feet or ankles and move the feet as far away as possible and then back 10 x. It can be easier to do this off the mat.

Paschimottanasan Variation 1 & 2

- From sitting position bend forward from the hips, cross the arms over and hold the shins. Hold the left shin with the right hand, right shin with the left hand. Press the hands against the feet and at the same time press the feet outwards. Practice 10 x
- From sitting position bend forward from the hips, cross the arms over and hold the feet. Hold the left foot with the right hand, right foot with the left hand. Press the hands against the feet and at the same time press the feet outwards. Practice 10 x

Ballerina Walking

- From standing position raise the heels and come onto the toes. Walk forwards ten steps and back ten steps, staying on the toes. Continue 5 x.

Newspaper Scrunching

- Place a piece of newspaper on the ground and stand on it. Scrunch the newspaper by clenching the toes, trying to pick it up with the feet. Continue for up to one minute.

Chair Yoga

These are just some of the practices that can be done with a chair. In some the person can sit completely in the chair, for some the person needs to sit on the edge of the chair. Stools or other chairs can also be helpful.

Chair Pawanmuktasana Series 1



- **Toe Bending** – with one or two feet, feet on the floor or raised.



- **Ankle Bending**, legs raised



- **Ankle rotation** – one ankle or both, together in one direction, together in opposite directions



- Ankle rotation with help of hand. (ankle loose) Ankle is just sitting past the other thigh



- Kneecap contraction – raise legs out the front or keep knees bent



- Raised leg pose – raise leg parallel to floor or higher if comfortable (thigh can lift off chair slightly) – with one leg, building up to two legs



- Knee bending towards chest– one leg and to ground, building up to straightening leg and then bending to place on ground



- Knee rotation, lifting thigh or keeping it relaxed on chair



- Half and full butterfly, foot may be high on thigh or lower down, easier version is toes on ground and bringing knee out to side.



- Leg movement 2 – with knee bent or straight (small circles)



- Namaskara



- **Hand clenching**



- **Wrist bending**



- **Wrist rotation (together or one by one holding wrist with other hand)**



- **Elbow bending out to the side**



- **Elbow bending forward**



- **Elbow rotation**



Arm movements 1, 2, 3, 4 – small and large circles



- **Shoulder movement 1, 2 (one shoulder, both)**
- **Ardha chandrasan (side stretch)**
- **Tennis elbow twist**
- **Stretch arm to side and support**



- Scapula hug



Gomukhasan arms



- Garudasan –arms but stay sitting on chair



- Garudasana legs
- Neck movements, datta mudra



- **Forward bend - keeping knees bent**



- **Forward bend twist - remain sitting (prep movement 2) – can raise arm up to sky or wrap around body**



- **Back bend –push the chest forward to arch the spine and increase bend**



- Twist in sitting – with knees together, with knees crossed, Ardha matsyendrasan variation



- From standing – hands on back of chair and bend forward to make a right angle, try to pull body back to lengthen spine. Can bring feet in a little closer to increase stretch if desired.



- Garudasan with support of chair



- Patangasan with support, from front and from sides



- Vrikshasan with support if needed or keep feet flat on ground

Chair Surya Namaskar



1. Namaskar



2. Raise arms over head in namaskar or do arm mvt 1



3. Forward bend, hands reach feet



4. Leg on chair, hands holding edge of chair, arching and looking up or holding the leg



5. Lifting to bridge – optional



6. Forearms on thighs and back bending



- 7. Hands on knees, rounding the back
- 8. Back to 4, then 3, 2, 1

Yoga for the Eyes

- ॐ The eye exercises, as recommended by Sawmi Satyananda, are helpful for strengthening the eyes, releasing muscular and mental tension, balancing the eyes, improving short or long sightedness, co-ordination, turned eyes and other malfunctions of the eye muscles.

Precautions and Contra-indications

- ॐ Avoid for any major eye disorders such as glaucoma, cataract, retinal detachment, trachoma or any kind of inflammation of the eyes. If needed consult an eye specialist before starting.
- Before starting it is good to splash some cool water in the eyes or bathe the eyes using an eye cup. Also during the exercises, if needed, one can again splash the eyes.
 - All practices should be done in a relaxed manner, with breaks for water or palming whenever needed.
 - The exercises can be done sitting on a mat or in a chair, at any time of the day.
 - The exercises are best done without glasses or contact lenses.
 - After completing all the exercises it is good to finish with a few minutes of shavasan.



- ॐ **Palming** – close the eyes, relax and rub the palms together, creating heat and prana. Gently place the hands over the eyes till all the warmth has been absorbed. Repeat 3-5 times. This practice is especially helpful for revitalising the eyes, removing tension and improving circulation.
- ॐ **Blinking** – blink the eyes ten times in a fast manner. Then close the eyes and relax for a few breaths. Repeat 3-5 times. This especially helps those who blink irregularly.



- ॐ **Sideways Viewing** – Raise the arms to shoulder level, making a loose fist with the thumbs pointing upwards. Move the arms sideways until one can only just see the thumbs. Next focus on the left thumb, exhaling, then eyebrow centre, inhaling, then right thumb, exhaling

and again the eyebrow centre, inhaling.. This is one round. The head should not move. Repeat 5-10 times.



ॐ **Front and Sideways Viewing** - Raise the arms to shoulder level, making a loose fist with the thumbs pointing upwards. Move one arm sideways until one can only just see the thumb. Keep the other arm directly in front. Focus on the left thumb, then right thumb, again left thumb and right thumb. One can do this with the breath to increase awareness. Continue 5-10 times. The head should not move. Repeat on the other side.



ॐ **Up and Down Viewing** –Place the hands on the knees, making a loose fist with the thumbs pointing upwards. Keeping the arms straight slowly raise one thumb on an inhalation as high as one can, maintaining the focus on the thumb. Exhaling lower the thumb down. Repeat with the other hand. Continue 5-10 times on each side. The head should not move.



- ॐ **Rotational Viewing** - Place the hands on the knees, making a loose fist with the thumbs pointing upwards. Keeping the arm straight slowly start making a large circle with the thumb, maintaining the focus on the thumb. Inhaling upwards and exhaling downwards. Repeat in the other direction. Again repeat the process in each direction with the other thumb. Continue 5-10 times on each side. The head should not move.



- ॐ **Preliminary Nasikagra Drishti (Preliminary Noretip Gazing)** – Raise the arm in front of the body, at eye level with the thumb pointing upwards. Focus on the thumb and while inhaling bring the thumb to the nose. Focus on the nose for a few seconds and then exhaling straighten the arm, keeping the focus on the thumb. Repeat 5-10 times.
- ॐ **Near and Distant Viewing** – Sit or stand near a window where there is a horizon or view far away. Focus on the nose tip for a few seconds, while inhaling, then exhaling focus on the horizon for a few seconds. Repeat 5-10 times.
- ॐ **Alphabet Viewing** – With the eyes open write the alphabet with the eyes. Writing in running writing is best as it flows more easily for the eyes. Now with the eyes closed repeat the alphabet. This exercise helps move the eyes in all directions.

Additional Practices

- ❖ Shambhavi Mudra
- ❖ Balancing Poses
- ❖ Nasikagra Drishti – Noretip Gazing

❖ Tratak

Helpful tips for Eye Health

- Banana skin – the inner part - reduces tiredness and irritability
- Milk or rosewater – dipped in cotton and pressed on the eyes reduces tiredness and refreshes. In Ayurveda breast milk is recommended.
- Eye bath
- Splashing eyes
- Sun bath on the eyes at sunset or sunrise
- Diet – vegetarian, lots of fruit and veg, good fats
- Lifestyle change – better lighting, watching screens
- Relaxation – mental tension affects eyes, mind and eyes should be relaxed and there will be no strain
- Barefoot walking at sunrise and sunset

Psychological Problems

“Mind is like a monkey... Mind is like a drunken monkey.... Mind is like a drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion... Mind is like a drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion and possessed by demons”

About 50% of the population will suffer from a mental disorder at some point in their lives. Luckily, yoga therapy is very appropriate for these problems; technically there is no limit to what psychological problem yoga can treat. This is due to neuroplasticity- the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. Changes in neural pathways and synapses occur due to changes in behaviour, environment, neural processes, thinking, emotions, as well as changes resulting from bodily injury. Yoga is ideally suited to change neural pathways because it effects changes on so many of these levels.

For instance, anxiety is not a direct response to an event, but rather a reaction because a certain neural pathway was triggered. You see something (a snake), this triggers a memory (snake = deadly), which then triggers a fear response. Primal emotions such as fear are controlled by the amygdala ('reptile brain'); there are good evolutionary reasons that we have them. However, the pathways which trigger these emotions can be modified. This means that you can create new neural links that create anxiety even though it's not the appropriate response.

Neural pathways are created via neurotransmitters in the brain, the key ones being serotonin, norepinephrine (a type of adrenaline), dopamine and GABA. Adrenaline gets released by the adrenal gland but also by the brain itself. In addition, some other substances can cross the blood/brain barrier- including caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and drugs. This is how people become addicted. A neurochemistry imbalance leads to mental imbalance. Yoga helps restore neurochemical balance.

What is a mental disorder or abnormal behaviour?

One key characteristic is maladaptive behaviour- Adaptive behaviour is a type of behaviour that is used to adjust to another type of behaviour or situation. These behaviours are most often social or personal. Maladaptive behaviour is a type of behaviour that is often used to reduce one's anxiety, but the result is dysfunctional and non-productive. Maladaptivity is frequently used as an indicator of abnormality or mental dysfunction, since its assessment is relatively free from subjectivity.

For example, in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, one develops a behaviour (compulsion) to distract from an unpleasant recurring thought (obsession) e.g. washing hands whenever they want to hurt someone. This creates a neural pathway linking the thought and behaviour. Yoga works on breaking this link by helping to change the neural pathway.

Pain or discomfort- Suffering of some sort is a key feature of psychological problems. Though the person may not be aware that there is something wrong with them, they do experience mental or physical ill effects.

Deviancy / Violation of standards of society- Behaviour that is not expected and/or accepted in the sufferer's surroundings, which leads to further problems as they withdraw and lose touch with society.

Social discomfort- Inability to feel calm and at ease in social situations, which usually leads to avoidance and further problems.

The upshot is that with psychological problems, quality of life is affected to some degree in all spheres of functioning (social, work, family). This is why personality disorders are controversial; many do not accept that they should be included as psychological problems because people do not experience suffering, social discomfort etc.- it's mainly other people who experience any ill effects!

It is important to note that stress is not inherently bad. We need stress sometimes, so that we take action or make a change. Stress increases efficiency, partly due to the physiological changes it induces, partly due to our response to it. However, sometimes stress increases but efficiency does not increase (e.g. we do nothing or panic) which can lead to further stress. According to yoga, when you feel peaceful within, you react peacefully so the aim is to develop the right attitude- not to avoid stress.

In a similar way, being anxious or depressed are also not inherently bad. They are signals that something needs to be addressed or changed. We have become increasingly intolerant of negative emotions, instead of dealing with them appropriately. In fact it is our intolerance to them that creates problems- we push away or suppress, which doesn't work.

Types of disorders

According to DSM – IV's definition of mental disorders the following components are considered necessary for diagnosis

- Clinically significant behavioural or psychological pattern
- Associated with distress or disability (in one or more important areas of functioning)
- Not simply a predictable response to an event (death of loved one)

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety – response to internal, unknown, vague and conflictual threat whilst fear is a response to an external, definite or non-conflictual threat. (Conflictual = the arousal of two or more strong motives that cannot be solved together.) Anxiety is characterised most commonly as a diffuse, unpleasant, vague sense of apprehension, often accompanied by autonomic symptoms such as headache, perspiration, palpitations, tightness in chest, mild stomach discomfort and restlessness,

Involves negative mood, worry about future threat or danger, difficulty concentrating, irritability and at physiological level creates a state of tension, sleep disturbance and chronic over arousal of flight or fight response.

Phobias – Specific, Social

Panic attacks (with or without Agoraphobia) – palpitations, sweating, trembling, shortness of breath, feeling of choking, chest pain, abdominal distress, feeling dizzy, lightheaded or faint, derealisation or depersonalization, fear of dying or going crazy, chills or hot flashes

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

When anxiety is constant or overwhelming and interferes with relationships and activities, it stops being functional. The fight or flight response is activated by a thought rather than actual danger. The medical view is a serotonin imbalance so they prescribe anti-anxiety medication (sedatives) or SSRIs. These only further mess up the brain's neurochemistry without addressing the cause. Other therapies include behaviour and exposure therapy.

Mood disorders

Mood – pervasive and sustained feeling tone that is experienced internally and that influences person's behaviour & perception of the world

Depression – depressed all day, diminished interest in almost all activities, weight loss or weight gain, insomnia or hypersomnia, fatigue or loss of energy, feeling of worthlessness or guilt, difficulty concentrating, indecisiveness, thoughts of death or suicide

Bipolar - Depression with periods of mania. A manic episode is an abnormally and persistently expansive, elevated or irritable mood, inflated self-esteem, decreased need for sleep, more talkative, flight of ideas or thoughts racing, distractibility, increase in goal directed activity

Suicide- Thoughts of suicide are a key feature and there is a significant risk of suicide in severe cases.

Physiological causes of anxiety & depression include neurotransmitters imbalance (serotonin, norepinephrine, GABA, dopamine) or hormonal imbalance (due to chronic arousal to sympathetic nervous system or failure of negative feedback loop between HPA axis.) Medical treatments options include antidepressants, mood stabilizing drugs, anti-psychotic drugs, ECT, TMS, bright light therapy. The best way to reduce the need for medication is through a yogic lifestyle.

Schizophrenia & other psychotic disorders- severe mental disorders that cause abnormal thinking and perceptions. People with psychoses lose touch with reality. Two of the main symptoms are delusions and hallucinations. Delusions are false beliefs, such as thinking that someone is plotting against you or that you rule the world. Hallucinations are false perceptions, such as hearing, seeing, or feeling something that is not there.

Somatoform disorders- When mental factors such as stress cause physical symptoms the condition is known as somatization. The symptoms can't be traced back to any physical cause and are not the result of substance abuse or another mental illness. People with somatoform disorders are not faking their symptoms. The pain and other problems they experience are real. The symptoms can significantly affect daily functioning.

Fibromyalgia is not considered somatoform because the nervous system shows a measurable increased response to pain. In this condition yoga can also bring relief, as for anxiety asanas should be built up over time.

Dissociative disorders- Dissociative identity disorder (formerly multiple personality disorder); Dissociative amnesia; Depersonalization disorder (periods of detachment from self or surroundings).

Impulse control disorders- can't resist the urge to do something harmful to themselves or others (this is often a feature of other disorders too, especially substance misuse) e.g. addictions, eating disorders, compulsive gambling, compulsive hair pulling, stealing, fire setting, intermittent explosive attacks of rage.

Substance related disorders- Harmful overuse of alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, opium, cocaine, amphetamines, LSD & other narcotics. Sub-categories are Substance Dependence Disorder and Substance Abuse Disorder.

Eating disorders- Severe disturbance in eating behaviour. 70% of people with eating disorders also have depression. Psychologically it is due to fear of isolation or not being socially acceptable. Other causes include socio-cultural factors, media influence, family influence, body dissatisfaction and dieting.

Anorexia nervosa – distorted perception of body shape and size, intense fear of gaining weight even though underweight

Bulimia nervosa – binge eating and efforts to prevent weight gain using self induced vomiting, excessive exercise, use of laxatives

Sleep disorders- excessive sleep, insomnia, nightmares, night terrors, bedwetting, teeth grinding etc.

Others

Learning disorders –reading disorder, writing disorder (dyslexia), mathematics disorder

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Autism – characterized by absence of communication, social interaction and repetitive behaviour

Mental retardation- IQ below average and in between 25 to 90 which affects the daily functioning significantly.

Yogic View and Treatment of Psychological Problems

*“I want peace”, someone asked Buddha, he replied-
Remove ‘I’ – that is ego
Remove ‘want’-that is desire
Then you have ‘Peace’*

When you accept and confront your own negative emotions and deal with them constructively, they achieve their purpose (to highlight a problem or change something) and go away. Yoga helps achieve this by working on three components of mental problems:

- Fear: fear of death, fear of loss, insecurities... (don't want what is happening)
- Desire: cravings, likes, dislikes (want something you don't have)
- Anger/ego: the above two frustrated energies mixed with the ego's identification (carrying excess 'I-baggage'- Me, mine, my likes dislikes, my desires, my aversions, my friends, my enemies, my views, my attitude, my family, my relationships, my expectations, my mood changes, my wants at particular time, my society, my political ideas, my religious ideas, my experience, my preferences, my importance)

All three of these lead to dissatisfaction, which has a domino effect: -> negative emotions -> non-acceptance -> stress -> maladaptive behaviour -> stress -> etc. etc. Often ending in pathological behaviour (mental problems).

Causes of psychological problems

- Conditionings – in family, society, religion
- Habits and experiences
- Uncontrolled sensual desires
- Not knowing how to deal with stress, anxiety, depression, anger
- Feeling of isolation and rejection

We experience or imagine many expectations from ourselves, our family and society. Because of so much of baggage we become fragile. If this happens or this does not happen, or if someone says this or does not say, if my relationships break up, if I lose this or I gain this which I don't want, if I do not get this, if I cannot do this, if problems come in between my path, if this is difficult for me to achieve- then I will break down.

Yogic Treatment of Anxiety and Mood Disorders

The yogic treatment for depression is similar as for anxiety, because the causes are similar. They are both responses to stress; in anxiety, the person fights the stress, in depression, the person gives up and surrenders to it. Both can be relieved through vagus nerve and hypothalamus stimulation. Stress arises due to a fear imbalance (inappropriate over-activation of the fight-or-flight response) so restoring balance is a major aim of treatment. To counter the fight-or-flight response, the parasympathetic nervous system is stimulated. Pranayama is especially helpful, e.g. deep breathing, brahmari, ujjayi, anulom vilom; also yoga nidra, uddiyana bandha. Meditation is

introduced later as it is too confrontational for anxiety that is not yet under some control in the mind. Mudras reset the pranic energy (like a computer's ctrl+alt+del). Asanas release the fight-or-flight response. With pratyahara (sense withdrawal) it's best to start gently e.g. walking.

Asanas help because they take attention away from emotions to the body parts being worked. They also increase tolerance to discomfort and decrease reactivity to body sensations. Over a period of time, an anxious person can stay longer in a pose and even relax. This teaches them to relax in stressful situations instead of experiencing sympathetic nervous system reactions. Due to the relaxation, the parasympathetic nervous system is stimulated.

Initially asana should not be held to the point that they feel uncomfortable. Instead, it needs to be built up over at least one month. An anxious person should start with dynamic practice (surya namaskar, vinyasa) to ease into it, and then start holding poses for longer during the dynamic practice. Taking good care of an anxious person is more important than asana.

In terms of cleansing practices, jala neti works on the frontal lobe. This is the area involved in planning and judgment but also emotions. It forms a part of the emotional circuit, as it is connected to the amygdala (primal emotions) via the cortex. Jala neti calms this circuit.

Mood disorders are characterised by hopelessness, which yoga considers to be caused by overstimulation of ida nadi (moon principle- feminine, right side of brain, left side of body). Right nostril stimulates physical activity whilst the left stimulates mental. So when the left side is overstimulated, this results in lethargy, digestive problems etc. A depressed person may not want to do asanas, but less physical practices can be very beneficial too. The key yogic practices include

- Right nostril breathing
- Inversions
- Kapalabhati
- Uddiyana bandha
- Bhastrika
- Ujjayi

Yoga nidra can be helpful in depression but for some people it is not helpful at all, similarly as with anxiety it may be too confrontational in the mind and lead to deeper depression. Both anxious and depressed people should sleep on their left side, which aids right nostril breathing and so helps the mind become quiet.

Eating disorders

Yogic treatment can include vaman practiced on an empty stomach, if the patient is open to it. Yoga nidra is also very beneficial, with a personalised visualisation focusing on positive lifestyle. It is important not to imply blame by making it seem like it's an attitude or perspective problem.

Other Yoga techniques

Relaxation – when body is relaxed, the mind can be confronted & problems can be resolved. Examples include shavasana, yoga nidra and deep breathing.

Meditation – when we become aware of our deeper self, we come face to face with our inner nature, inner conflicts and suppressed mental contents. Meditation can include Om chanting, So-Ham, Kundalini meditation, Prana meditation.

Mantras – Increase willpower, develops control over thoughts and thought process and provides strength to resolves

Mental relaxation techniques – Resets the mind by ‘closing the account’ at night, helps you live in the moment and is importance in relation to living a complete life, helps with acceptance of me and my world. The aim is to make friends with the mind by observing and learning the types of thoughts we have and the ways to deal with them (As per Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras).

Thought study techniques -Evaluate good opposed to bad thoughts, stressful opposed to relaxing thoughts. Do relaxing activities. Evaluate relevance of thoughts by writing them down. Write down all thoughts (negative or any other disturbing thoughts) and burn them mentally or on a real flame. Write mantra in a notebook preferably in Sanskrit (mantra can be “I am healthy & happy”). Counter the thought – learn to think 2 times a positive thought every time you have a negative thought.

Research on Yoga for mental problems

Richard J. Davidson, PhD, Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, brain & immune function - Significant increases in left-sided anterior activation, a pattern previously associated with positive affect, in the meditators compared with the nonmeditators. Significant increases in antibody titers to influenza vaccine among subjects in the meditation compared with those in the wait-list control group.

Kirkwood G, et al. "Yoga for Anxiety: A Systematic Review of the Research," British Journal of Sports Medicine (Dec. 2005): Vol. 39

Yoga and stress response. (Harvard Health Publications, Harvard Medical School, (2008).)

Yoga can reduce the stress of cancer diagnosis and treatment experienced by childhood cancer patients and their parents. The findings were published in the September/October 2010 edition of Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing, published by the Association of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Nurses (APHON).

Mandlik G et al. Yoga Vidya Gurukul, “A cross cultural study of Yogic life style on Anxiety and Optimism.” 2009

Research on Omkar & other mantras

Dr B.N. Gangadhar. Chanting “Om” stimulates the central nervous system, giving relief from mental health issues including depression, anxiety and even epilepsy.

The mantra has the potential to work on the Vagus nerve, stimulating the brain through its auricular branches.

Jill E. Bormann, Steven Thorp, Julie L. Wetherell, & Shahrokh Golshan (2008). A Spiritually Based Group Intervention for Combat Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Journal of Holistic Nursing v26 n2, pp 109-116. PMID 18356284, DOI: 10.1177/0898010107311276.

Fifty-five participants (83.3%), both veterans and VA staff, practiced the mantram technique and reported 147 stressful incidents in which it was helpful.

The most frequently reported uses of the mantram were for managing: emotions other than stress (i.e., impatience, anger, frustration – 51%), stress (23.8%), insomnia (12.9%), and unwanted thoughts (12.3%).

Of the veterans who participated, nearly all were male and seven had been diagnosed with a psychiatric disorder, while six suffered from PTSD.

Depression - Yoga Perspective

“Depression is a necessary state of mind for positive change”

Yoga has always maintained that depression is a starting point for positive change in life. When our life demands a change, we should let go of the old and accept the new. But if we resist the new changes in life we come across depression.

Story of Buddha: Buddha’s father King Shuddhodan gave him everything. He had all of the material wealth, all the luxuries of life. He was always surrounded by young, strong and beautiful people. But despite of all this he became extremely depressed after seeing an old man, a sick man, and a dead man. Buddha realized that there is pain and suffering everywhere in life. He could not deal with it and wanted to find a way out. So Buddha left the palace and his family life. Depression was the reason for Buddha’s spiritual journey. He performed austerities like fasting, meditation and many other difficult practices for years and finally overcame the pain and suffering in life. If we try and understand the reasons behind the spiritual journey of Buddha then we can see the depressed state of mind responsible for this spiritual evolution. Had it not been for the depression, Buddha would not have tried to find a new path.

Story of Padavas - In the story of the Pandavas they had their right to the kingdom but they were denied their right by the king who was their uncle. The king gave them a barren, useless piece of forest which had nothing. It was injustice to the Pandavas and a sad and depressing situation. But Lord Krishna told the Pandavas that they should always look at this event as an opportunity. Krishna also told them that they have got an opportunity to show their creativity, create a better kingdom; they have all the freedom to take their decisions which was not there in the old place. And, the Pandavas did build a very prosperous and powerful new kingdom called “Indraprastha”. In the history it became one of the most popular destinations for people from all parts of the world. Instead of getting depressed, the Pandavas accepted the new situation without any attachment of the old.

Story of Lord Rama – Rama was a prince of the Ayodhya kingdom. He was very intelligent, generous, and brave and everyone in the kingdom loved him. King Dasharath, who was his father, declared that Rama would become the next king. Everyone in the kingdom was very happy but the night before the ceremony his step mother forced the King Dasharath to deny Rama his right to the kingdom. She forced Rama to go into exile for 14 years. Rama could have got depressed but instead he chose the hard path with a smile. Rama’s wife, Sita, and his brother, Laxman, accompanied him. They had to live in the forest with the absolute bare minimum of things, but they were happy to stay in a hut instead of a palace, eat fruits instead of royal food. Sita was hijacked by the demon King Ravan from the forest. Lord Rama had to fight the war with the evil demon King Ravan, finally Rama won the battle, established law and helped people. If Rama would have got depressed and refused to accept the change then he would never have done these great favours to humanity.

It is important that we understand the reasons behind depression, with one of the most important reasons being “Attachment with old”. In our life many times situations change and this demands change in our attachments. We must change the attachments to material life, objects, relationships and people, our goals and self-concepts. If we are flexible to let go of old attachments and accept new life with less attachments then we evolve but if we resist this change, we get depressed.

Human nature is to avoid difficulties. The body and mind wants less challenges, the natural tendency of the nervous system is to avoid hard work, hardship and stressful situations. We are

getting attached to sensual and material comforts all the time which leads to weakening of the nervous system. It is this attachment with the easy life which eventually leads to a depressed state of mind when life becomes challenging.

Example of Arjuna and Krishna (Yogeshwara-supreme being of yoga):

The entire Bhagavad Gita is based on the depression of Arjuna and how he overcame it. Arjuna experienced extreme depression and asked Krishna for help. Krishna is happy that Arjuna is depressed because now he can reflect on what he's been doing up until this point and what he wants do in the future. Depression brings one to this understanding of the important changes that life demands.

Swami Niranjanananda gave a very nice story of a man and a tree. A man sees a tree on his journey, he stops at the tree for shade and fruit, then gets the comfort. After a while gets attached with the comfort and then doesn't want to leave the tree. He refuses to move on. The man is holding on to that tree and says that the tree won't let him go. Now if someone cuts down the tree or the tree becomes old and falls down or someone pushes that man out of the tree then he experiences depression.

According to yoga, why do we get depressed? The reason for depression is our conditionings. Because of patterns, how we are taught to think, social systems, religions, cultures and family influences, these are the reasons for depression. So these negative conditionings need to change! Depression is a signal that something is wrong with the old system. Depression shows that a person needs a new paradigm. Depression tells us that we need to look inside and bring new concepts, new attitudes and adapt. The purpose of being in depression is CHANGE.

What is the purpose of these stories? When you have depression, you should be happy that you are going to change and evolve.

Yogic Ways of Dealing with Depression:

1. **Tapa-Austerities – way to control the mind**
 - a. One must discipline the mind. The depressed mind doesn't listen. The more you bring the mind under control, the better it is for you so you can control the mind when negative thoughts enter. So focus the mind. Examples of austerities: simplicity, no luxuries, giving up something you like, skipping dinner, silence, less sleep, cold shower, avoiding sweets.
2. **Karma Yoga – Learn to be happy by working for others**
 - a. By helping others without attachment one can feel joy and realize that happiness is not achieved by gaining material things.
 - b. Karma yoga teaches us to connect with others, their joy, pain and suffering becomes your own. Share pain and suffering. Share happiness.
 - c. Lord Ram's wife Sita said she's not happy without him and would go with him into exile.
3. **Vairagya/Renunciation/Non-attachment**
 - a. We have been taught and conditioned in society to become sad and depressed. Parents give a child a toy when he is crying and tell him that he should become happy because he has a toy. So the child learns that when he is sad he should get something. So as we grow older we want cars, money and new objects because we were trained like this since childhood. But, in real life, getting these material objects

creates stress and suffering. So yoga says to change the conditionings that connect happiness with material objects.

- b. Example of lotus petal. It's in water but water doesn't stick to the petals. Water slides off. So become indifferent to and renounce the material things.
- c. Buddha left his family, palace and wealth, becoming indifferent to material life.

4. Bhakti Yoga- learn to channelize emotions

- a. Faith is the result of bhakti. Devotion is a result of bhakti. It makes one optimistic. Ishwari pranadhana - surrender. Bhakti yoga has a positive effect on depression through mantras and kirtan.

These are just some of the ways that yoga can help one to overcome depression and to lead a happy, content and positive life.

The Yogic Diet

There is a natural instinct within all of us to follow a healthy balanced diet. Deep down inside we know what is good and what is not good for us but we chose to ignore the body and mind. Regular practice of yoga helps to stimulate these natural instincts. Yoga changes the habits and is a process of normalization.

The purpose of food should be looked at before choosing what to eat. Why do we need to eat? To give energy to the body and mind, increase the resistance power of the body and to develop the mind. Fresh food gives lightness, happiness, joyfulness and increases intelligence. The food should be suitable for the mind, body, intelligence and soul.

There are no special dietary rules for asana practitioners although there are many recommendations with the main ones being to eat natural foods and eat in moderation. Yoga advises a vegetarian diet, particularly as it is preparation for the higher forms of yoga. Vegetarianism has been found to promote inner calmness and harmony between the body and mind, whilst eating meat has been linked with inner tension, anger, disharmony and an increase in desires. Vegetarianism is the basis of a sattvic diet.

A yogic diet ideally follows a sattvic or pure food diet. A balance of fresh fruit, vegetables, cooked whole grains, milk, legumes, nuts and seeds, using a combination of both raw and cooked foods. These foods increase sattwa in the body because they are light, simple and supply all the necessary nutrients. They increase our physical and mental vitality making it easier to experience clarity, lightness and peace of mind. Rajasic foods are prepared with much oil and spice. They create heaviness and restlessness in the mind. Meat and fish are classified under these. Onion and garlic are also under this group as they increase desire. Tamasic foods are foods that are old and stale. They lower the energy and cause laziness. They include foods that are not cooked properly or chewed well and processed foods. Stale, processed and frozen foods have lost their pranic energy. If we try to eat only sattvic foods as much as possible we can slowly change the body chemistry, renewing the digestive system and taking away any strain. Ideally we should eat foods that take minimum energy to digest, so that the remaining energy can be used for more productive uses.

When eating it is important to fill the stomach half full with food. A quarter should be left for water or liquids. The last quarter should be left empty for digestion to take place. This space is necessary for the stomach to churn the food with the digestive juices. It is also said in Hindu culture that this last quarter should be left for Lord Shiva.

Eat to satisfy hunger without getting any feelings of heaviness or laziness. It is said that you should eat only what is needed. To find out how much you need to eat do an experiment. One time eat until you have a feeling of fullness, being aware of how much you are eating. From there half the amount of food, this is your requirement. There should be enough space in the stomach so that if somebody asked you to eat a meal with them after you had already finished your meal you could do it without any ill effects.

The timing of meals should be fixed. In this way the body begins to release digestive secretions at a certain time. It is important not to skip meals so that the body doesn't keep going into panic mode and decide to store excess fat. Change the diet according to the seasons. Don't eat imported foods. Always try to eat what is local and fresh. If you know your dosha/prakriti then make your food choices accordingly. Don't eat when negative, angry or depressed. How you are thinking effects your digestion. You should only eat when you are happy and peaceful. When you eat focus, feel and

appreciate every mouthful, eating slowly and being thankful for the food that has been given to you. Remember, eat to live, don't eat to live.

We must start with the basics, the essentials for our survival, if we wish to achieve anything in yoga. Diet and food are among these. We can only really begin to live the full yogic lifestyle when we have gone through the first layers of our needs, desires, intuitions and instincts, preparing us for the physical, mental, psychic and spiritual levels.

The digestive system is one of the most important systems in the body and links all the other systems together. A poor digestive system is the core problem to many health conditions. It is affected not just by what we eat but also by our emotions. An awareness of the digestive processes and the choices we make in eating can help to achieve both physical and mental balance, bringing peace and wellbeing.

Case Taking and Examination

Case taking is an art. It is a science and getting the information out of the patient is a skill that develops through experience but there are certain guidelines.

Taking a case is actually receiving the case and understanding what are patients sufferings and the feeling and the intensity of their problem. What we ask and how we ask about the complaints is very important.

What to ask?

Basic data:

Name, age, marital status, occupation, address, phone, e mail is the basic data needed for communication and legal purpose.

We will need to know their occupation. We will try and get more details, i.e. what is he doing in the office all day? What is his daily office routine? Is he sitting? Is he a worker exposed to fumes which cause his asthma? There is often a co-relation of the complaint to the occupation.

Also in the basic data we can take note of their height and weight.

Chief complaints

What is his chief complaint? We must note the order at which it first started using the 'O D and P', origin, duration and progress. It may have had a slow origin or an accidental one such as a fall or acute start of complaints. We need to know if there has been a break in its duration, e.g. if it only occurs in the winter. Also we need to know its progress, where it started, i.e. if it was first a trouble in the lower back which progressed to sciatica. Also progress means to understand the increase or decrease in the intensity of the complaints.

For each complaint we should know the L S M

- 1) Location of each chief complaint eg. exactly where is the headache?
- 2) Sensation, or type of pain, is it a throb or a tingle, the intensity of the complaint.
- 3) Modifying factors, what increases or decreases the problem. Is it related with position of body, food, time of the day, mental state etc.. It could also be related with season, temperature or related to the menstrual cycle or also some major life event.

Past History

Find out the history of past and the outcome of the same (cure, recovery, disability, controlled with medication etc.). Spend 2-3 minutes finding out about illnesses he has been suffering from in the past, operations, infectious diseases since childhood, accidents.

Personal History

Question him on his personal history, daily routine, exercise, appetite, thirst, bowel movements, urine, sleep, addictions, medication and habits. Note a few details and try to find out if anything of it is related with the complaints of the patient.

Family history

Note the family history. What diseases have they been suffering from? Note the cause of death of any close family member.

Mental/emotional state

Try and know his mental or emotional state. As this is very personal, you need to be cautious. We may be able to find things out via the family. It is best to avoid direct questioning; we can often tell from the face of the person; we can judge if they want a certain question or not.

How to ask questions?

How we ask these questions is important and can win us more patients. Remember they are taking your case at the same time and asking themselves is this Doctor fit to treat me?

Do not have any fixed ideas about the patient in your mind; try to have the mind blank so as not to be biased. Don't jump to conclusions before knowing the complete facts of the complaints/patient.

A diagnosis/conclusion needs to be based on the following information:

- a) Collect the information from the patient/friends/family.
- b) Observe him for yourself.
- c) Use preliminary investigations, blood and urine tests.
- d) Use specialized investigations, e.g. MRI scan.

Information from relatives and friends of the patient can be helpful. Patients can sometimes hide things e.g. addiction. Some say they never smoke or sometimes the patient is unaware of the complaints, eg. snoring

Speak less and listen more. Don't interrupt him. He may forget what he wanted to tell you. As far as possible, unless he is digressing completely, let him talk. Taking a history is an art. If he misses something you need to know, you can ask him at the end.

When he says certain things show attention to him. Avoid playing with things whilst listening; don't distract and irritate. Show you are listening; try and have some rapport. Show respect for the feelings/emotions of the patient and respond according to it.

Don't ask leading questions, or the questions which can be answered as YES or NO. Frame the questions such that the patient has to talk more and more about it. While receiving a case you should be speaking less and the patient speaking more.

You can ask direct questions at the end if you want any specific information you have not received from him.

Look carefully at past reports as the patient has invested time, energy and money to find out this information. If you don't understand the reports, you can consult the experts in that field and find out what the investigation says.

Body language is important. They need to have faith and confidence that you can reduce their suffering. Some just feel better by talking about their problems. This reduces their mental agony. There should also be confidence that their problems will not be discussed with anyone else.

Give sufficient time to the patient, especially as he is going to pay you; if not you may lose him. He should have no questions when he leaves. Take off your watch! Learn how to develop patience; the patient should be satisfied and confident in you. If it is relevant, don't hurry him.

Don't blame other practices such as modern medicine. Talk about the advantages of Yoga but don't criticize other practitioners. Talk what best you can offer instead of talking bad/ criticizing other healers/treatment.