



LIFE IN BALANCE: PRANAYAMA

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

“Meditation. Practicing meditation teaches us to slow down and focus.”

What do you think of when you think of yoga? Tight pants? Hot studios? Bendy ladies? There are Eight Limbs of yoga, all of which require zero physical flexibility, and my past few columns have started to explore the limbs that are less popular in the US. Why? These limbs are extremely important to our Human Flourishing.

This month we'll explore pranayama, but here is a list of all eight in both their Sanskrit and English names.

Yamas – Ethical Restraints

Niyamas – Ethical Observances

Asana – Posture

Pranayama – Breathing Techniques

Pratyahara – Sense Withdrawal

Dharana – Focused Concentration

Dhyana – Meditative Absorption

Samadhi – Bliss or Enlightenment

The word Prana means energy, breath or life force. I once had a teacher that asked us to look at a live tree vs. a dead tree. What's the difference? The prana.

Prana-yama translates to breath control. Why does breath matter? Not only does it keep us alive but it is central to our relaxation and stress response. The ancient practice of yoga might not have included modern technology but anecdotally they could see the impact breath had on people. There are countless modern studies published on the impact of breath. I encourage you to do your own research or schedule a session with a yoga therapist or breathwork practitioner to take a deep dive – but if you incorporate even just one of the

techniques I am outlying below on a daily basis I would bet you would see some improvement in your stress levels. That being said if you have any respiratory, gastrointestinal or cardiac sensitivities you should check with your doctor before incorporating a daily breath practice in case there are any contraindications, you may also want to avoid these after eating a full meal the first time as the lungs are closer to your stomach than you may think. Unless noted, start with a practice of one minute and build up to ten, as many times during the day as you need.

Breath awareness – Truth be told, we often take our breath for granted until we are sick or our breath escapes us. I recommend a practice of tuning into your natural breath and just becoming aware of that.

Physiological Sigh – This technique has been getting a lot of media attention lately as some research has backed this as a quick fix to stress, which is why I am including this up so high on the list. Take a full inhale through your nose to fill up your torso with breath, then take in another quick inhale through the nose, then exhale it out the month. No need to do this more than twice.

Extended Exhale – If you feel tension building up, pay attention to your inhale and exhale. Focus on extending your exhale to assist in relaxation. For example, if you inhale to the count of three, try to exhale to the count of five.

Box Breath – Inhale to the count of four, hold it for the count of four, exhale to the count of four, hold to the count of four. As you get more experienced you might start to lengthen the counts, to 5, 8, 10, etc. **Three Part Breath** – An excellent practice in breath control. Inhale fill up your belly, then your ribs, then your chest, then exhale it all out the mouth.

Breath of Joy – Want a more active form of Three Part Breath to get you moving? Inhale fill up your belly with breath and extend arms out in front of you (think Frankenstein), inhale fly arms out to the side (think T-Shape), inhale stretch arms up to the ceiling and then exhale out the mouth with bent knees, letting your arms flop down toward the floor.

Grounding Breath – This was given to me by Reiki Master Jessie Knight from Healing Spirit Reiki. I try to personally do this a few times per day. Inhale and envision air coming down through the top of your head. Exhale it out your feet.

Buzzing Bee Breath – Gently put your fingers on your tragus of the outer ear. Inhale through the nose with lips closed. Keeping lips closed, exhale as if you were breathing out your mouth so you're creating a humming sound. Really feel the soothing sensation of your own hum. Try to keep the inhale and exhale fluid but of course take breaks as needed.

Alternate Nostril Breathing – My

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personal recommendation is to blow your nose first. Try a full inhale and exhale out the nose to warm up. With your thumb, gently press your right nostril closed (pressing the ala to the apex) and inhale through your left nostril. Then close the left nostril and exhale out the right nostril. Repeat by inhaling through the right nostril,

closing it and exhaling out the left nostril.

Questions on any of these? Email me at Kaitlyn@tozziyoga.com. There are absolutely other pranayama techniques to explore, so don't think that these are the only ones!

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