
– Alternate Nostril Breathing –

WHAT IS ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING?

Alternate Nostril Breathing (also called Nadi Shodhana or anuloma-viloma) is the practice of intentionally and in a focused way breathing for a few (or several) minutes. It is a form of Pranayama: a practice of consciously controlling breathing. Doing Alternate Nostril Breathing:

- balances and harmonizes the two hemispheres of your brain
- helps reduce stress and anxiety
- lowers your heart rate
- improves sleep
- helps relieve mental tension
- supports healthy blood circulation
- ensures oxygenation of every cell in the body
- facilitates weight loss, as studies are now showing:
<http://www.sciencealert.com/this-is-where-body-fat-ends-up-when-you-lose-weight>
- stabilizes the flow of prana (life-force energy) in the body
- allows the release of emotions
- facilitates deeper breathing
- connects the physical and mental/emotional bodies
- naturally centers and focuses the mind.

With regular practice attention span and an ability to focus for long periods will most likely be positively effected.

An Alternate Nostril Breathing practice or exercise helps to balance the flow of breath, energy, and prana that moves into and out of the nostrils and to equalize the activity of the two hemispheres of the brain. During normal life our nostrils take turns with which one is more open; air flows through the more open nostril and not through the other. That other nostril waits in stand-by mode for its turn, which is approximately ninety minutes later. We don't notice this dynamic if everything is functioning optimally—ie: unless our respiratory system is congested.

This dynamic of natural alternate nostril dominance happens all the time—except for at sunrise and sunset when both nostril are equally active.

So why do a practice or exercise of intentional Alternate Nostril Breathing, if our bodies do it, anyway? Because there are so many benefits to it! Read on...

LEFT NOSTRIL for calming – RIGHT NOSTRIL for energy

Breathing in through your left nostril will access the right-side “feeling” hemisphere of your brain, and breathing through your right nostril will access the left-side “thinking” hemisphere of your brain. Consciously alternating your breath between both nostrils will allow you to activate and access your whole brain.

12 BENEFITS OF ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

1: REVITALIZES YOU

A few rounds of alternate nostril breathing is a quick pick-me-up if you are feeling tired or stressed. It provides your body with a much-needed dose of energy by bringing prana (life-force energy) in and circulating it to all of your cells through your circulatory system.

2: IMPROVES BRAIN FUNCTION

When your mind is dull, concentration and mental clarity are poor. Alternate nostril breathing brings prana and oxygen into your body and distributes equal amounts of each to both sides of the brain at the same time for improved bilateral brain function. Five minutes of alternate nostril is a great way to improve cognitive performance.



3: CLEANSSES YOUR LUNGS

A daily five-minute practice, morning and night, of alternate nostril breathing is great way to remove stale air and impurities from your lungs and to utilize the entire capacity of your lungs. Seventy percent of the body's waste products are eliminated via our lungs.

4: CALMS AN AGITATED MIND

A few minutes of focused alternate nostril breathing is helpful in calming an over-active and agitated mind. It is a wonderful way to balance excessive mental Vata dosha.

5: MERGES THE LEFT BRAIN AND RIGHT BRAIN

Alternate nostril breathing integrates the two sides of the brain by increasing traffic through the corpus callosum.

6: ENCOURAGES A CALMER EMOTIONAL STATE

A few rounds of alternate nostril breathing done at a time of emotional distress and upset lessens the intensity of the emotional state and helps facilitate a calmer mental state.

7: IMPROVES SLEEP

For those times when it is difficult to fall asleep, practice a form of intentional breathing called "Lunar Breathing". Lie on your right side. This will, over a period of a few minutes, switch breathing over to your left nostril and will activate your parasympathetic nervous system. This will bring about a "rest and relax" state, helping you to slow your heart rate and more easily fall asleep. Lunar breathing is cooling, calming, and nourishing for your whole being.

8: GREAT PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION

Alternate nostril breathing can be practiced for a few minutes before beginning a meditation session to focus the mind.

9: SOOTHES YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Engaging in alternate nostril breathing triggers the parasympathetic nervous system's relaxing influence.

10: REGULATES THE COOLING AND WARMING CYCLES OF THE BODY

Left nostril is feminine, nurturing, calm, receiving and cooling. Right nostril is masculine, heating, competitive, and action-oriented. Both are important for functioning in the world. However, intentionally favoring breathing through one nostril over than the other can effect the heatedness or coolness of the body. To cool a overheated body, breath through the left nostril. To warm up on a cold day, breath through the right nostril

11: CLEARS AND BOOSTS YOUR ENERGY CHANNELS

Alternate nostril breathing directs the flow of energy throughout the entire body—preventing sluggishness and stagnation. It oxygenates the blood and allows energy (prana) in your body to be vigorous and to flow.

12: ENHANCES REST AND RELAXATION

Alternate nostril breathing calms the mind by balancing the activity of and between the two brain hemispheres.

CAUTIONS

Those with high blood pressure should avoid holding their breath at any time during this practice. As with all breathing exercises, always approach the practice with caution, especially if you have a respiratory condition, such as asthma or emphysema. Never attempt any form of pranayama for the first time without the guidance of a qualified and knowledgeable teacher. Stop the exercise if you become faint or dizzy. Always work within your own range of limits and abilities. If you have any medical concerns, talk with your doctor before practicing yoga.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

Begin in a comfortable seated position. Sit up straight and relax your body. Soften your jaw and allow your breath to flow naturally.

With your right hand, bend your index and middle fingers, keeping your ring finger, pinkie finger, and thumb extended. This hand position, or mudra, is called Mrigi Mudra.

Close your right nostril with your right thumb.

Inhale deeply through your left nostril.

At the top of your inhalation, close your left nostril with the ring finger of your right hand as you take the thumb away from and release the right nostril.

Exhale through your right nostril.

Keeping the left nostril closed, inhale deeply through your right nostril.

Seal your right nostril again with your thumb, then release your left nostril.

Exhale out of your left nostril. You should now be in the original position, with your thumb sealing your right nostril. This is one cycle.

Balance your inhalations and exhalations so they are the same length through both nostrils.

Repeat this pattern of breathing for up to ten full cycles, gradually increasing the number of repetitions as you gain experience.

Keep your breath steady, rhythmic, and smooth throughout the practice. As you gain experience, you will be able to balance your inhalations and exhalations so they each last for a count of eight.

MODIFICATIONS & VARIATIONS

If you have a shoulder or neck injury, or have not built up enough strength, it might be difficult to keep your right arm raised throughout the exercise. To remedy this, prop your right elbow up on a bolster, or rest it on the seat of a chair placed next to you. Allow your right arm, shoulder, and elbow to be fully supported so that there is no undue strain.

The right hand is traditionally used to seal the nostrils. However, those who are left-handed might find it more comfortable to perform the exercise with their left hand.

