

# BHASTRIKA PRANAYAM

BELLOWS BREATH

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YOGIYOG

GUIDE TO NIRYANA



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## PRANAYAM

The word pranayama is comprised of two roots: 'prana' plus 'ayama'. Prana means 'vital energy' or 'life force'. It is the force which exists in all things, whether animate or inanimate. Although closely related to the air we breathe, it is more subtle than air or oxygen. Therefore, pranayama should not be considered as mere breathing exercises

aimed at introducing extra oxygen into the lungs. Pranayama utilises breathing to influence the flow of prana in the nadis or energy channels of the pranayama kosha or energy body. The word 'ayama' means 'control' and is used to denote various rules or codes of conduct. Ayama is defined as 'extension' or 'expansion'. Thus, the word pranayama means 'extension or expansion of the dimension of prana'. The techniques of pranayama provide the method whereby

the life force can be activated and regulated in order to go beyond one's normal boundaries or limitations and attain a higher state of vibratory energy.

### Four aspects of pranayama

In the pranayama practices there are four important aspects of breathing which are utilised. These are:

1. **Pooraka** or inhalation
2. **Rechaka** or exhalation
3. **Antar kumbhaka** or internal breath retention
4. **Bahir kumbhaka** or external breath retention.

The different practices of pranayama involve various techniques which utilise these four aspects of breathing. There is another mode of pranayama which is called kevala kumbhaka or spontaneous breath retention. This is an advanced stage of pranayama which occurs during high states of meditation. During this state, the lungs stop their activity and the respiration ceases. At this time, the veil which prevents one from seeing the subtle aspect of existence is lifted and a higher vision of reality is attained.

The most important part of pranayama is actually kumbhaka or breath retention. However, in order to perform kumbhaka successfully, there must be a gradual development of control over the function of respiration. Therefore, in the pranayama practices more emphasis is given to inhalation and exhalation at the beginning, in order to strengthen the lungs and balance the nervous and

अथासने दृढे योगी वशी हितमिताशनः ।  
गुरुपदिष्टमार्गेण प्राणायामान्समभ्यसेत् ॥२:१॥

*Athaasane dridhe yogee vashee hitamitaashanaha.  
Guroopadishhtamaargena praanaayamaansamabhyset.*

Thus being established in asana and having control (of the body), taking a balanced diet; pranayamas should be practised according to the instructions of the guru.

*Hatha Yoga Pradipika (2:1)*

pranic systems in preparation for the practice of kumbhaka. These practices influence the flow of prana in the nadis, purifying, regulating and activating them, thereby inducing physical and mental stability.

## THE PRANIC BODY

### PANCH KOSHAS/FIVE SHEATHS

According to yogic physiology, the human framework is comprised of five bodies or sheaths, which account for the different aspects or dimensions of human existence. These five sheaths are known as:

1. **Annamaya kosha**, the food or material body
2. **Manomaya kosha**, the mental body
3. **Pranamaya kosha**, the bioplasmic or vital energy body
4. **Vijnanamaya kosha**, the psychic or higher mental body
5. **Anandamaya kosha**, the transcendental or bliss body.



Although these five sheaths function together to form an integral whole, the practices of pranayama work mainly with pranamaya kosha.

### PANCH PRANA

The pranamaya kosha is made up of five major pranas which are collectively known as the pancha, or five, pranas: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana.

**Prana** in this context, does not refer to cosmic prana but rather to just one part of the pranamaya kosha, governing the area between the larynx and the top of the diaphragm. It is associated with the organs of respiration and speech, and the gullet, together with the muscles and nerves that activate them. It is the force by which the breath is drawn inside.

**Apana** is located below the navel region and provides energy for the large intestine, kidneys, anus and genitals. It is concerned with the expulsion of waste from the body.

**Samana** is located between the heart and the navel. It activates and controls the digestive system: the liver, intestines, pancreas and stomach, and their secretions. Samana also activates the heart and circulatory system, and is responsible for the assimilation and distribution of nutrients.

**Udana** controls the area of the body above the neck, activating all the sensory receptors such as the eyes, nose and ears. Thought and consciousness of the outside world would be impossible without

it. Udana also harmonises and activates the limbs and all their associated muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints, as well as being responsible for the erect posture of the body.

Vyana pervades the whole body, regulating and controlling all movement, and coordinating the other pranas. It acts as the reserve force for the other pranas.

## PANCH UPA-PRANAS

Along with the five major pranas there are five minor pranas known as the upa-pranas. These five sub-pranas are: naga, koorma, krikara, devadatta and dhananjaya. Their functions are described as follows.

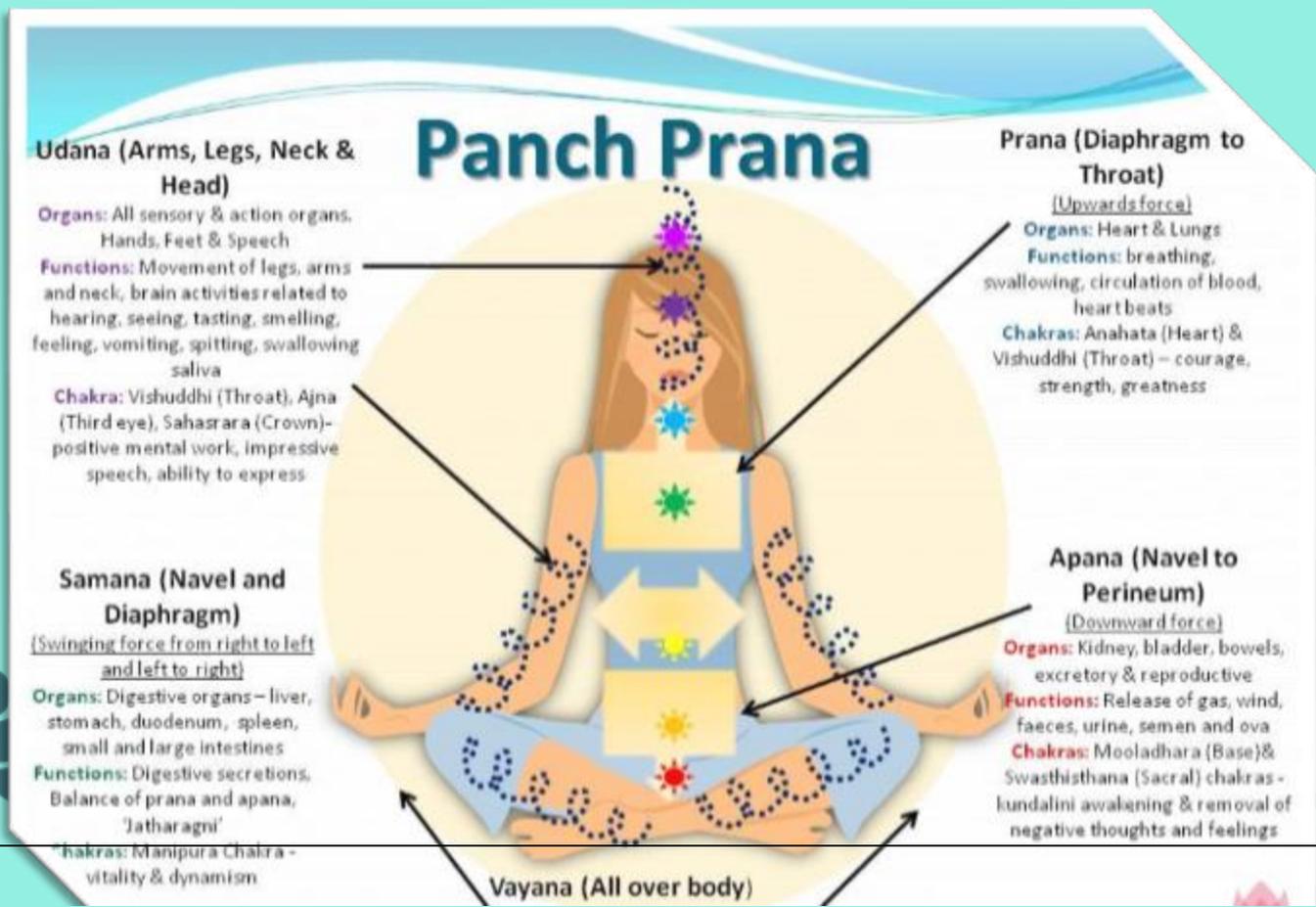
**Naga** is responsible for belching and hiccups.

**Koorma** opens the eyes and stimulates blinking.

**Krikara** generates hunger, thirst, sneezing and coughing.

**Devadatta** induces sleep and yawning.

**Dhananjaya** lingers immediately after death and is responsible for decomposition of the body.



# KOSHA

## the 5 Psychic Sheaths

**Anandamaya Kosha**  
(Bliss Body)

**Anandamaya kosha**

Anandamaya means composed of ananda, or bliss. In the Upanishads the sheath is known also as the causal body. In deep sleep, when the mind and senses cease functioning, it still stands between the finite world and the self. Anandamaya, or that which is composed of Supreme bliss, is regarded as the innermost of all. The bliss sheath normally has its fullest play during deep sleep; while in the dreaming and wakeful states, it has only a partial manifestation. The blissful sheath (anandamaya kosha) is a reflection of the Atman which is bliss absolute.

**Vijnanamaya Kosha**  
(knowledge Sheath)

**Vijnanamaya kosha**

Vijnanamaya means composed of vijnana, or intellect, the faculty which discriminates, determines or wills. Chattampi Swamikal defines vijnanamaya as the combination of intellect and the five sense organs. It is the sheath composed of more intellect, associated with the organs of perception. Sankara holds that the buddhi, with its modifications and the organs of knowledge, form the cause of man's transmigration. This knowledge sheath, which seems to be followed by a reflection of the power of the citi, is a modification of prakriti. It is endowed with the function of knowledge and identifies itself with the body.

**Manomayakosha**  
(mental Sheath)

**Manomaya kosha**

Manomaya means composed of manas or mind. The mind (manas) along with the five sensory organs is said to constitute the manomaya kosa. The manomaya kosa, or "mind-sheath" is said more truly to approximate to personhood than anamaya kosa and pranamaya kosha. It is the cause of diversity, of I and mine. Sankara likens it to clouds that are brought in by the wind and again driven away by the same agency. Similarly, man's bondage is caused by the mind, and liberation, too, is caused by that alone.

**Pranamaya Kosha**  
(Vital Air Sheath)

**Pranamaya kosha**

Pranamaya means composed of prana, the vital principle, the force that vitalizes and holds together the body and the mind. It pervades the whole organism, its physical manifestation is the breath. As long as this vital principle exists in the organisms, life continues. Coupled with the five organs of action it forms the vital sheath. In the Vivekachoodamani it is a modification of vayu or air, it enters into and comes out of the body.

**Annamaya Kosha**  
(Food Sheath)

**Annamaya kosha**

This is the sheath of the physical self, named from the fact that it is nourished by food. Living through this layer man identifies himself with a mass of skin, flesh, fat, bones, and filth,

According to the Kosha system in Yogic philosophy, the nature of being human encompasses physical and psychological aspects that function as one holistic system. The Kosha system refers to these different aspects as layers of subjective experience. Layers range from the dense physical body to the more subtle levels of emotions, mind and spirit. Psychology refers to the emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of our being. Together, all aspects make up our subjective experience of being alive.

# CHAKRAS

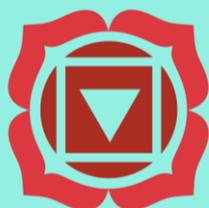
## DEFINITION OF CHAKRA

The word chakra literally means 'wheel' or 'circle' but in the yogic context a better translation is 'vortex' or 'whirlpool'. The chakras are vortices of pranic energy at specific areas in the body which control the circulation of prana permeating the entire human structure. Each chakra is a switch which turns on or opens up specific areas of the brain. In most people these psychic centres lie dormant and inactive. Concentration on the chakras while performing yogic practices stimulates the flow of energy through the chakras and helps to activate them. This in turn awakens the dormant areas in the brain and the corresponding faculties in the psychic and mental bodies, allowing one to experience higher planes of consciousness which are normally inaccessible.

The major chakras are seven in number and are located along the pathway of sushumna which flows through the centre of the spinal cord. Sushumna originates at the perineum and terminates at the top of the head. The chakras are connected to a network of psychic channels called nadis, which correspond to the nerves but are more subtle in nature.

The chakras are depicted symbolically as lotus flowers, each having a particular number of petals and a characteristic colour. The lotus symbolises the three stages the aspirant must pass through in spiritual life: ignorance, aspiration and illumination. It represents spiritual growth from the lowest state of awareness to the highest state of consciousness. The petals of the lotus, inscribed with the beeja mantras or seed sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet, represent the different manifestations of psychic energy connected with the chakras and the nadis or psychic channels leading into and out of them. Within each chakra is a yantra comprised of the geometrical symbol of its associated element and beeja mantra. Within the yantra there is also a presiding deity, which represents particular aspects of divinity, along with the corresponding vahana or vehicle which is an animal form, representing other psychic aspects related with the particular centre.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVEN CHAKRAS



Muladhara:  
The Root Chakra

### Mooladhara chakra

Muladhara or the base or root chakra is related to security, survival and also to basic human potentiality. This center is located in the region between the genitals and the anus. Although no endocrine organ is placed here, it is said to relate to the inner adrenal glands, the adrenal medulla, responsible for the fight and flight response when survival is under threat. In this region is located a muscle that controls ejaculation in the sexual act. A parallel is drawn between the sperm cell and the ovum, where the genetic code lies coiled, and the kundalini. Symbolized by a lotus with four petals.



Swadhisthana:  
The Sacral Chakra

### Swadhisthana chakra

Swadhisthana or the sacral chakra is located in the groin, and is related to emotion, sexuality and creativity. This chakra is said to correspond to the testicles or the ovaries, that produce the various sex hormones involved in the reproductive cycle, which can cause dramatic mood swings. Symbolised by a lotus with six petals.



Manipura:  
The Solar Plexus Chakra

### Manipura chakra

Manipura or the solar plexus chakra is related to energy, assimilation and digestion, and is said to correspond to the roles played by the pancreas and the outer adrenal glands, the adrenal cortex. These play a valuable role in digestion, the conversion of food matter into energy for the body. Symbolised by a lotus with ten petals.



Anahata:  
The Heart Chakra

### Anahata chakra

Anahata or the heart/emotions chakra is related to love, equilibrium, and well-being. It is related to the thymus, located in the chest. This organ is part of the immune system, as well as being part of the endocrine system. It produces T cells responsible for fighting off disease, and is adversely affected by stress. Symbolized by a lotus with twelve petals.



Vishuddha:  
The Throat Chakra

### Vishuddhi chakra

Vishuddha or the throat chakra is said to be related to communication and growth, growth being a form of expression. This chakra is paralleled to the thyroid, a gland that is also in the throat, and which produces thyroid hormone, responsible for growth and maturation. Symbolized by a lotus with sixteen petals.



Ajna:  
The Third Eye Chakra

### Ajna chakra

Ajna or the third eye is linked to the pineal gland. Ajna is the chakra of time and awareness and of light. The pineal gland is a light sensitive gland, that produces the hormone melatonin, which regulates the instincts of going to sleep and awakening. It has been conjectured that it also produces trace amounts of the psychedelic chemical dimethyltryptamine. Symbolized by a lotus with two petals.



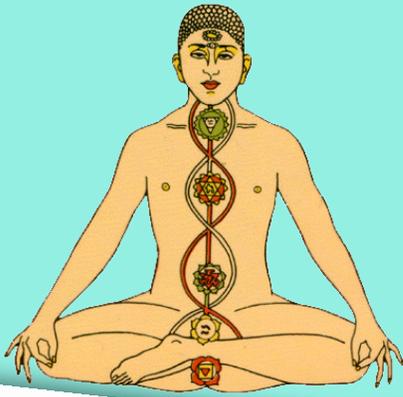
Sahasrara:  
The Crown Chakra

### Sahasrara Chakra

Sahasrara or the crown chakra is said to be the chakra of consciousness, the master chakra that controls all the others. Its role would be very similar to that of the pituitary gland, which secretes hormones to control the rest of the endocrine system, and also connects to the central nervous system via the hypothalamus. The thalamus is thought to have a key role in the physical basis of consciousness. Symbolized by a lotus with a thousand petals.

## NADIS

The word nadi literally means 'flow' or 'current'. The ancient texts say that there are seventy two thousand nadis in the psychic body. These are visible as currents of light to a person who has developed psychic vision. In recent times the word nadi has been translated as 'nerve', but actually nadis are composed of astral matter. Like the chakras, they are not actually part of the physical body, although they correspond with the nerves. Nadis are the subtle channels through which the pranic forces flow. Out of the large number of nadis in the psychic body, ten are major and of these, three are most significant. These are **ida, pingala and sushumna**. The most important of these three is sushumna. All the nadis in the psychic body are subordinate to sushumna, even ida and pingala.



## Ida, Pingala and Sushumna

Sushumna nadi is the spiritual channel located at the centre of the spinal cord. It originates from mooladhara chakra at the perineum and terminates at sahasrara, at the crown of the head. Ida nadi emanates from the left side of mooladhara and spirals up the spinal cord, passing through each chakra in turn, forming a criss-cross pathway which terminates at the left side of ajna chakra. Pingala nadi emanates from the right side of mooladhara and passes in an opposite manner to that of ida, terminating at the right side of ajna. Ida and pingala represent the two opposites forces flowing within us.

Ida is passive, introvert and feminine; it is also known as the chandra or moon nadi. Pingala, on the other hand, is active, extrovert and masculine and is called the surya or sun nadi.

### FIFTH LESSON पञ्चमोपदेशः ।

धेरण्ड उवाच—

अथातः संप्रवक्ष्यामि प्राणायामस्य यद्विधिम् ।  
यस्य साधनमात्रेण देवतुल्यो भवेन्नरः ॥ १ ॥

PRĀṆĀYĀMA, OR RESTRAINT OF BREATH.

GHERANDA SAID:—1. Now I shall tell thee the rules of Prāṇāyāma or regulation of breath. By its practice a man becomes like a god.

आदौ स्थानं तथा कालं मितहारं तथापरम् ।  
नाडीशुद्धिं ततः पश्चात् प्राणायामं च साधयेत् ॥ २ ॥

2. Four things are necessary in practising Prāṇāyāma. First, a good place; second, a suitable time; third, moderate food; and, lastly, the purifications of the nādis, (vessels of the body, i.e., alimentary canal, &c.)



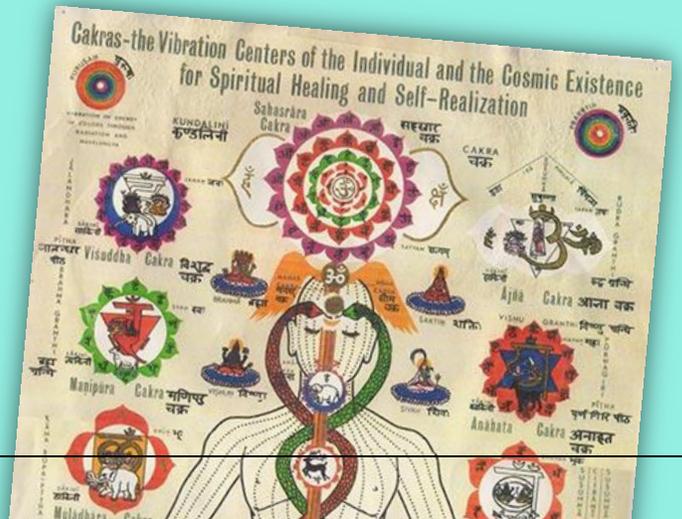
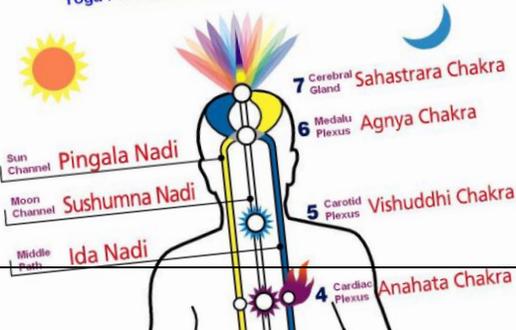
धेरण्ड उवाच—

मलाकुलासु नाडीषु मास्तौ नैव गच्छति ।  
प्राणायामः कथं सिध्येत्स्वहानं कथं भवेत् ।

तस्मादादौ नाडीशुद्धिं प्राणायामं ततोऽप्यसेत् ॥ ३५ ॥

Gheraṇḍa said:—35. The Vāyu does not (cannot) enter the nādis so long as they are full of impurities (e.g., faeces, &c.). How then can Prāṇāyāma be accomplished? How can there be knowledge of Tattvas? Therefore, first the Nādis should be purified, and then Prāṇāyāma should be practised.

### Yoga Pranayama Awakens Kundalini Powers



# BHASTRIKA PRANAYAM

## PREPARATORY PRACTICE

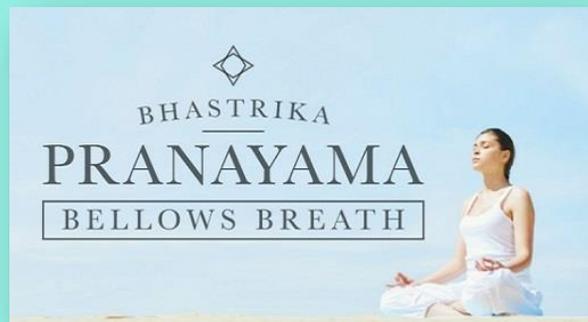
Sit in any comfortable meditation posture, preferably padmasana, ardha padmasana or siddha/siddha yoni asana, with the hands resting on the knees in either chin or jnana mudra. Keep the head and spine straight, close the eyes and relax the whole body. Take a deep breath in and breathe out forcefully through the nose. Do not strain. Immediately afterwards breathe in with the same force. During inhalation the diaphragm descends and the abdomen moves outward. During exhalation the diaphragm moves upward and the abdomen moves inward. The above movements should be slightly exaggerated. Continue in this manner, counting 10 breaths. At the end of 10 breaths, take a deep breath in and breathe out slowly.

This is one round. Practice up to 5 rounds. Keep the eyes closed and concentrate on the breathing and the counting.

Practice note: When accustomed to this style of breathing, gradually increase the speed, always keeping the breath rhythmical. Inhalation and exhalation must be equal.

## TECHNIQUE - BHASTRIKA PRANAYAMA (BELLOWS BREATH)

Sit in any comfortable meditation asana, preferably padmasana, ardha padmasana or siddha/siddha yoni asana, with the hands resting on the knees in either chin or jnana mudra. Keep the head and spine straight. Close the eyes and relax the whole body. Raise the right hand and perform nasikagra mudra.



### Left nostril

Close the right nostril with the thumb.

Breathe in and out forcefully, without straining, through the left nostril 10 times. Count each breath mentally. The abdomen should expand and contract rhythmically with the breath. The pumping action should be performed by the abdomen alone. Do not expand the chest or raise the shoulders. The body should not jerk. There should be a snuffing sound in the nose but no sound should come from the throat or chest.

After 10 respirations, breathe in deeply through the left nostril keeping the right nostril closed. Fill the lungs as much as possible, expanding both the chest and abdomen. Close both nostrils and hold the breath inside. Retain the breath for a few seconds. Exhale through the left nostril.

## Right nostril

Close the left nostril and breathe in and out forcefully 10 times through the right nostril, counting each time. Inhale slowly and deeply through the right nostril. Close both nostrils and hold the breath inside. Retain the breath for a few seconds. Breathe out slowly through the right nostril.

## Both nostrils

Open both nostrils. Breathe in and out forcefully through both nostrils 10 times, mentally counting each time. Inhale slowly and deeply through both nostrils. Close both nostrils and retain the breath for a few seconds. Breathe out slowly through both nostrils together. Breathing through the left, the right and both nostrils, as above, forms one complete round.

## BREATHING

Bhastrika may be practised at three different breath rates: slow, medium and fast, depending on the capacity of the practitioner.

Slow bhastrika is practised to approximately one breath every two seconds, with no undue force on inhalation or exhalation. It is like amplified normal breathing. It is especially useful for beginners and those using bhastrika for therapeutic purposes, although it may also be practiced at all stages.

Medium bhastrika increases the speed of respiration to approximately one breath every second.

Fast bhastrika means a breathing speed of around two breaths per second. Both medium and fast breathing are suitable for intermediate and advanced practitioners.

The abdominal muscles will become stronger with regular practice. As they do so, the number of respirations may be increased by 5 per month from the initial count of 10 to a maximum count of 40 to 50 respirations through the left, the right and both nostrils.

## DURATION

Up to 5 rounds. Slowly increase the duration of retention up to 30 seconds after breathing through the left, the right and both nostrils. Do not strain.

## AWARENESS

Physical - on the breathing process, the physical movement of the abdomen and mental counting.

Spiritual - on manipura chakra.

## NAME ORIGIN

The Sanskrit word bhastrika means 'bellows'. Thus, bhastrika pranayama is also known as the bellows breath, as air is drawn forcefully in and out of the lungs like the bellows of a village blacksmith. The bellows increases the flow of air into the fire, producing more heat.

Similarly, bhastrika pranayama increases the flow of air into the body to produce inner heat at both the physical and subtle levels, stoking the inner fire of mind/body.

## PRECAUTIONS

- A feeling of faintness, excessive perspiration or a vomiting sensation indicates that the practice is being performed incorrectly. Avoid violent respiration, facial contortions and excessive shaking of the body. If any of these symptoms are experienced, the advice of a yoga teacher should be sought.
- This practice is ideal for purifying the blood and eradicating a bad complexion. However, if the stages are rushed, all the impurities will be ejected from the body in a rush which may exacerbate the condition. A slow, conscientious approach to this practice is, therefore, recommended.
- Bhastrika is a dynamic practice requiring a large expenditure of physical energy. Beginners are advised to take a short rest after each round.

## CONTRA-INDICATIONS

Bhastrika should not be practised by people who suffer from high blood pressure, heart disease, hernia, gastric ulcer, stroke, epilepsy or vertigo. Those suffering from lung diseases such as asthma and chronic bronchitis, or who are recovering from tuberculosis, are recommended to practise only under expert guidance.

## BENEFITS

- This practice burns up toxins and removes diseases of the doshas or humours: kapha, phlegm; pitta, bile; and vata, wind.
- Because of the rapid exchange of air in the lungs, there is an increase in the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide into and out of the bloodstream. This stimulates the metabolic rate, producing heat and flushing out wastes and toxins.
- The rapid and rhythmic movement of the diaphragm also massages and stimulates the visceral organs, toning the digestive system.
- It is a useful practice for women during labour after a few months of proper preparation.
- Bhastrika reduces the level of carbon dioxide in the lungs. It is an excellent practice for asthmatics and those suffering from other lung disorders.
- It alleviates inflammation in the throat and any accumulation of phlegm.
- It balances and strengthens the nervous system, inducing peace, tranquillity and one-pointedness of mind in preparation for meditation.

## ADVANCED PRACTICE (WITH BANDHAS)

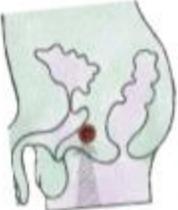
Once this practice has been mastered, jalandhara and moola bandha may be combined during each internal breath retention or after each round.

Bhastrika pranayama may be practiced in conjunction with jalandhara, moola and uddiyana bandhas. First practise jalandhara bandha with internal breath retention only. Once this practice has been perfected, combine jalandhara bandha with external breath retention. Then introduce moola bandha with jalandhara during internal retention, then external retention. When this has been mastered, apply uddiyana bandha on external retention only.

It may be necessary to adjust the ratio of the breath to suit the individual capacity.

#### Practice note

1. Both nostrils must be clear and flowing freely.
2. Mucus blockages may be removed through the practice of neti (Shatkarma).
3. If the flow of breath in the nostrils is unequal, it may be balanced by practicing padadhirasana as a breath balancing technique.
4. Beginners should be familiar with abdominal breathing before taking up bhastrika.



### Mula Bandha

the root lock

Mula means 'root', 'origin', or 'foundation'. In human body, it is located in the perineum.

*how-to*

Contract the same muscles used in holding the urine mid-stream.

*benefits*

The bandha helps balance the sexual desire. It moves apana vayu or the downward wind (in the body) up to meet with prana vayu or the master wind creating a yogic state.



### Jalandhara Bandha

the throat lock

Jala means a net or a web, the bandha is the first bandha that a yogi should master.

*how-to*

contract the throat and neck and bring the chin to the chest in the notch between the collar bones.

*benefits*

The bandha regulates the blood flow to the heart, the neck and head regions. It also guides the upward flow of energy down to fuse with the downward.



### Uddiyana Bandha

The abdominal lock

Uddiya means 'flying upward'. It is said to be the best bandha. It is "the elephant that kills the lion named Death."

*how-to*

Pull the abdominal muscles in and up after the complete exhalation and before the inhalation.

*benefits*

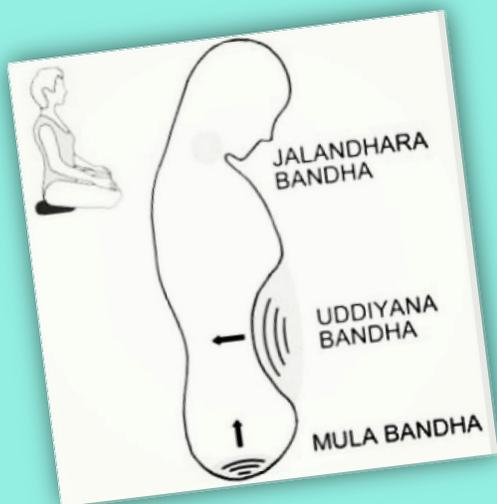
It massages and tones the heart muscles. It also moves the downward energy in and up towards

**Mula bandha**  
To lift the impurities (mala) up to the fire.

**Uddiyana bandha**  
To hold the impurities close to the fire to burn them, and evaporate amrita to replenish the "lake of the mind".

**Jalandhara bandha**  
To prevent amrita from falling into the fire.

[www.sequencewiz.com](http://www.sequencewiz.com)



**KEEP CALM AND HOLD MULA BANDHA**

