

Underhill Life

By Nancy Candeia, Adv-CYTO, E-RYT 500

Foundational *Prāṇāyāma* Practice

Prāṇāyāmas (breathing exercises) can relieve stress, increase vitality, balance emotions and calm the nervous system. A deeper inhale increases the amount of oxygen in the blood, which helps the internal organs function better. A complete exhale increases the body's ability to excrete carbon dioxide, a waste product of our metabolic processes. To practice *prāṇāyāmas* successfully, it is important to have bodily awareness and the ability to breathe without holding the body stiff. A yoga *āsana* practice is the best way to develop these foundational skills.

Preparing the body:

- If your sinuses are clogged, it would be good to do a warm salt water rinse. Use a neti pot, eye dropper, the palm of your hand or nasal rising squirt bottle. Make sure that the water is purified and warm. Unless you buy a pre-mixed salt solution to add to the water, use non-iodized salt and taste your solution to make sure that it is just slightly salty. Too much or too little salt will be uncomfortable. If your nose is dry, you can apply some oil to your nostrils.
- Begin with upper body stretches and *āsanas* that stretch the upper body and prepare the legs for easy sitting.
- Create some grounding and body awareness.
 - Feel your feet the ground.
 - Feel the chair or cushion on which you are sitting.
 - Sit up without creating tension in your neck or shoulders.
- Notice the breathing process to help create a deeper awareness of what you are feeling.
 - Begin with the air's entry through the nose and ending with the interplay between the diaphragm and the muscles and organs of the torso.
 - Become aware of the temperature, texture, sound, and length of the breath.

Foundational *prāṇāyāma* practices:

Become comfortable with these practices before moving on to more advanced level practices:

Yoga *Bandha*: Three-Dimensional Breath engaging *Bandhas*

- begin by breathing evenly and slowly in a 4-count pattern
- on your exhale, engage *mūla bandha*, *uddīyāna bandha* and *jalandara bandha*
- retain your breath for a count of 2, 4, 6 or more
- on your exhale, release the *bandhas*
- repeat up to 7 times
- *Mūla bandha* is a lift of the floor of the pelvis
- *Uddīyāna Bandha* is the feeling of lifting up of the lower waist and tucking it in the lower ribs
- *Jalandara bandha* is gently dropping the chin down to the chest without strain
- **Benefits:** grounds the energy

Three-Dimensional Breath – Take an even breath – one in which the inhale and exhale are similar in length and intensity, and the ribs are free to move in the front, sides and back. The back is not locked in an exaggerated effort to sit up straight. This is the foundational breath and posture for all other *prāṇāyāmas*.

Ujjayi Pranayama - "Victorious Breath." Using the 3-dimensional breath as a foundation, begin to make the sound of a whisper deep in your throat. You will feel your lower ribs working harder. This breath is often used during a flow *āsana* practice. Because of the sound, some people like to use this breath as a focus for meditation or to help them get to sleep. Be careful not to clench your jaw. Aside from the work of your diaphragm muscle, the rest of your body remains relaxed. Experiment with how loud you would like this breath work to be. It can be so quiet that only you can hear it, or it might be audible to others. Notice the different qualities that the loudness of the breath brings to your practice. Continue to be mindful of the sensations of the *Ujjayi* breath if you are using it in your flow practice.

Dirgha Pranayama - "Three-part Breath." Inhale in three parts and exhale in one long part. This breath is good for bringing your attention back to the present moment, and aiding in relaxation. I find that people of all ages enjoy doing this breath. I ask them to pretend that there is a small balloon in their lower ribs. Then inhale three times to blow it up. Exhale slowly and then breathe normally. I usually guide them to do one to three rounds.

Nāḍī Śhodhana - "Alternate Nostril Breath." This breath brings balance to the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Raise your right hand to the level of your nose. Using the thumb to close off the right nostril, exhale through the left nostril, then inhale through the left nostril. Then release the right nostril, and use the ring finger to close off the left nostril. Exhale through the right nostril, then inhale through the right nostril. Keep the breath even.

