

## **Yoga, Wellness, and Self Discovery - part 4 Yogic Breathing**

How often are you aware of your breath? Everything you do throughout every moment of the day is inseparably connected to the way you breathe. The quality and the rhythm of your breath changes the way you experience whatever you are doing and most importantly, your overall wellness. So how are you breathing?

You might be thinking, "I breathe just fine, after all I have been breathing all of my life." Ah but could you breathe better? Your overall wellness is reflective of the quality of your breathing habits. In fact, of all of the sources of energy that sustain us the breath is the most important; without it we die in minutes. Interestingly, most people never work on their breath. Our breath is a habitual experience, something that we just do and take for granted, but you can change the way you breathe just like you can change anything you do. Think of breathing as a form of exercise, a way to strengthen your respiratory muscles so you can be healthier.

On average, most people are shallow breathers utilizing only about two fifths of their lung capacity. Shallow breathing affects our overall wellness because our bodily systems depend on certain levels of oxygen to maintain functionality. By exercising our breathing muscles we breathe fuller breaths and we increase oxygen saturation levels in our bodies which promotes overall health and wellness.

The breath is connected to everything you do and every function of your body. The level and ratio of your breathing directly affects mental activity, brain function, memory, nerve transmission, mood, stress and energy levels. Fuller breathing also has a positive effect on metabolism, the immune system and healing abilities. Breathing massages internal organs helping digestion and elimination and strengthens the respiratory muscles. Breathing practices have also been found to be helpful with respiratory issues like asthma, allergies and sinus conditions. So how does all this tie into yoga?

Yoga has been using breathing practices for thousands of years. In yoga, the breathing practices are called Pranayama. Prana means energy or life force, the energy that sustains us; and Yama means to control, master or restrain. So the practice of breathing or Pranayama is the practice of being in control of your life force energy. Becoming conscious of what you are doing creates an opportunity to change your behavior. You change your very being by changing the relationship you have with your breath. You are not just breathing; you are the one that is breathing.

Yogic breathing practices are usually led at the beginning of a class and are used to create a certain kind of experience depending on the type of class. There are dozens of yogic breathing practices, all wonderful and beneficial depending on what you're looking to do, but the most important thing is that you practice. As with anything, the more you practice the better you become at doing it, using it, controlling it, and understanding it.

Starting a class with pranayama creates a calm, focused, relaxed mood often referred to as centering. Many types of yoga also use breathing practices as a meditation focus.

The first step is to relearn how to breathe and then build from there. In a yoga class you become aware of your breath and then you relearn how to breathe with control. As a result you begin to change your habitual breathing patterns and the relationship you have with your life; your mind, body and spirit. You start to have control over how you are and what is happening to you. If you change your breath, you change your world.

For more information on breathing from a yogic perspective and easy to learn breathing practices, see our website at [www.InfiniteLightYoga.com](http://www.InfiniteLightYoga.com), articles section, "Breathing and Yoga."

Yoga and everything it offers us is beneficial to our health and wellness; our mind body and spirit connection. Yoga is for everyone if you find the right teacher.

Let today be the day that you become more. Find a yoga teacher in your area that incorporates Pranayama (breathing) into their classes and start taking classes right away. It will change how you live your life! Remember, if you change your breath you will change your world!

In future articles we will continue to look at yoga-related practices and explore how they can become a vehicle for real change in our lives. You can't do yoga and not change.

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