

Module 6



200 hour
**YOGA
TEACHER
TRAINING
MANUAL**

Edition 3

Breathing Practices

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BREATHING

INTRODUCTION TO BREATHING

- For a complete understanding of the physical process of breathing, see *The Anatomy of Breathing*.
- Breathing affects every system in the body.
- Unlike other functions within the autonomic nervous system, breathing can be consciously controlled.
- Our ability to consciously work with the breath gives us a way to reduce stress and manage pain.
- Research shows the direct connection between breathing patterns and emotions.

Breathing Affects Everything!

Breathing affects your respiratory, cardiovascular, neurological, gastrointestinal, muscular, and psychic systems and also has a general effect on your sleep, your memory, your energy level, and your concentration. Everything you do, the pace you keep, the feelings you have, and the choices you make are influenced by the rhythmic metronome of your breath. – Donna Farhi

Proper breathing nourishes the cells of the body with oxygen and optimizes the functioning of the body on all levels. – Dr. Arthur C. Guyton, author of the world's bestselling physiology book *An Autonomic Function We Can Control at Will*

Your body's breathing center is actually in the brainstem, where many of your autonomic functions are controlled, such as your heart rate, blood pressure, skin temperature, and digestive process. Breathing is the only autonomic function that you can control at will, kind of like a manual override. Research indicates that when you manually take control of your breathing, you are given a little bit of control over your other autonomic functions as well... Probably the two most important benefits of yoga breathing are its effectiveness in stress reduction and pain management... The most phenomenal aspect of yoga breathing is that you are in control. You can send health-enhancing yoga breathing messages to your body any time, anywhere. – Larry Payne

Being Able to Consciously Change the Breath Leads to Big Changes

Your breath is part of a stress or pain response that is the easiest to consciously change. There is no way to consciously block the transmission of a pain signal from one brain cell to another or ask your adrenal glands to stop releasing stress hormones. Breathing can lead to big changes in how the mind and body function, including lowering stress hormones and reducing your sensitivity to pain. – Kelly McGonigal, PhD

Study: How You Breathe is How You Feel

The two-way connection between how you breathe and how you feel was elegantly demonstrated in a study that observed how the breath naturally changes during joy, anger, sadness, and fear... The researchers induced these four emotions in participants and measured the changes in breathing... They found that there were characteristic changes for each emotion. In a second study, the researchers turned the observations for each emotion into breathing instructions. They had participants change their breathing according to those instructions, with no hint that the breathing patterns were connected to specific emotions. The study found that the breathing patterns reliably created the emotions they were associated with, without any other emotion cue or trigger. – Kelly McGonigal, PhD

INTRODUCTION TO BREATHING & RESTRICTED BREATHING

Your students may not have a felt sense of unhindered, natural breathing. Oftentimes, unconscious breathing is not free, but rather is restricted and incomplete. Before attempting to manipulate the breath with pranayama, students need experience with the fundamentals, and the first is free and natural breathing.

Perfect Breath

Watch any resting animal breathe, and you'll witness the perfect breath: rhythmic, efficient, with the belly expanding and contracting. Young children [also]... will usually breathe low in their bodies, using their diaphragms. Yet... few people sustain that lower-body breath to adulthood... In essence, they're breathing the way our ancestors did when they were faced with fear, anxiety, or other temporary situations. Unfortunately, we've transformed these short-term solutions into long-term abnormal breathing patterns.

'I just realized that I don't really know how to breathe.' I hear this often after students encounter their constricted breath during their first experience of yoga. Even with clear instructions, it takes many weeks of practice before some students can actually breathe fully all the way to the bottom of their lungs, and even longer for some to be able to rapidly pump their bellies toward their spines in an energizing exercise like Kapalabhati. – Amy Weintraub

If I had to limit my advice on healthier living to just one tip, it would be simply to learn how to breathe correctly.

– Dr. Andrew Weil

Potential Causes for Breathing Issues

Some of the reasons why we may be breathing inefficiently and ineffectively include:

- Excessive sitting
- A hunched posture
- A habit of sucking in the belly
- Tight clothing
- Chronic pressure or stress, and chronic tension in the body
- A fall or other injury that caused torso pain
- A bad fright or other stressful event

The Breath & Release of Emotions

From a session of breath-initiated movement, it's likely that congested emotions will come up and be released from the body. I must emphasize that this work does not create grief, the grief already exists and is stored in the body. Breath-initiated movement is what liberates you from your past. When the grief comes out, something else comes out with it, and this is the most important of all, answers come out with it. New understanding of your past, resolution, reconciliation...these are the things that emerge from your breath work. - Max Strom

What Makes it Yoga?

I'd say that without that relationship [between the diaphragm and the breath in yoga class] it's not actually a yoga class. It may be stretching or calisthenics, but what makes it yoga is the conscious integration of movement, mind and breath. - Leslie Kaminoff

Help Students Feel Themselves

One of the most important things you can teach is to help your students feel themselves. Bring it into feeling and their body... Teach them to feel their breath. Teach them to feel their feet... Can I coach someone to experience their body more fully via their breath? That is life-changing right there. That's where I start every class, whether it's a beginning class or an advanced class. When you start focusing on the breath, you give the mind permission to be quiet. - Ana Forrest

Hatha Yoga Pradapika

When the breath is irregular, the mind wavers; when the breath is steady, so is the mind. To attain steadiness, the yogi should restrain his breath. - Hatha Yoga Pradapika second chapter translation, B.K.S. Iyengar

Breath + Awareness Can Enhance the Flow of Energy

Breath, of course, is life—without it you die fairly quickly! Breath in many ancient languages meant both life and air: *Spiritus* in Latin is your spirit and your breath; *prana* has a similar connotation—it is life force as well as breath. Our breath not only brings oxygen into our system (which our cells use to burn their fuels and release energy), but the very act of breathing can also be stimulating. If we combine a slow, steady breath with an awareness of what that breath feels like in a targeted area, we can also enhance the flow of energy to that region. Of course, we don't have lungs all over our body, but we do possess a body-wide fascial network. Each breath stresses that network, and if we are very attentive, we can feel this stress in the targeted area of each posture. - Bernie Clark

TEACHING BREATH PRACTICES

1. Teaching Cautions & Considerations Become clear on the cautions related to practicing pranayama and become knowledgeable of best practices for teaching about the breath, including teaching to beginners.
2. Intro to Breathing & Restricted Breathing Become knowledgeable about the power of the breath to affect physiology and emotions, and the causes and effects of breathing issues, including reverse/paradoxical breathing and chest breathing.
3. Natural Breathing Become proficient in the hallmarks and benefits of natural breathing and ways to promote conditions for an effortless breath.
4. Basic Breath Training Understand the difference between unconscious and conscious breathing and techniques for guiding students in conscious breathing that slows their breathing rate and expands respiratory capacity.
5. Yogic Breathing Understand the differences between clavicular, thoracic and diaphragmatic breathing and become knowledgeable on expert teachings related to conscious exhalation and diaphragmatic rib cage breathing.

CHANNEL-CLEANING BREATH

(NAH-DEE SHOW-DAH-NAH)

NADI = channel

SHODHANA = cleaning, purifying

Sometimes considered a preparation for pranayama, other times a formal practice.



JEFF NELSON

STEP BY STEP

Step 1 Sit in a comfortable asana and make Mrigi Mudra. Beginning pranayama students may have some difficulty holding their raised arm in position for the length of the practice. You can put a bolster across your legs and use it to support your elbow.

Step 2 Gently close your right nostril with your thumb. Inhale through your left nostril, then close it with your ring-little fingers. Open and exhale slowly through the right nostril.

Step 3 Keep the right nostril open, inhale, then close it, and open and exhale slowly through the left. This is one cycle.

Repeat 3 to 5 times, then release the hand mudra and go back to normal breathing. (NOTE: some yoga schools begin this sequence by first closing the left nostril and inhaling through the right; this order is prescribed in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika)

Step 4 Traditionally Nadi Shodhana includes breath retention, fixed ratio breathing, and the repetition of certain "seed" mantras (cf. Gheranda Samhita 5.38-54). For beginning pranayama students, it's best to focus only on the inhales and exhales.

POSE INFORMATION

SANSKRIT NAME **Nadi Shodhana Pranayama**

CONTRAINDICATIONS AND CAUTIONS

- Approach the practice of all bandhas and body mudras cautiously, especially without the direct guidance of an experienced teacher

PREPARATORY POSES

- Virasana
- Baddha Konasana

FOLLOW-UP POSES

- Bharadvajasana I

BENEFITS

- Lowers heart rate and reduces stress and anxiety
- Said to synchronize the two hemispheres of the brain
- Said to purify the subtle energy channels (nadis) of the body so the prana flows more easily during pranayama practice

PRANAYAMA TECHNIQUES: UJJAYI

Introduction

- Ujjayi is the process of narrowing the passageway through which air is moving, allowing the breath to be drawn out and consciously controlled.
- The practice causes an "ocean wave" or "hissing" sound.
- Although this breath is done with the nostrils, it can be easier to learn with an open mouth.
- Ujjayi is often used as the primary breathing practice during asana in Ashtanga, Power, Vinyasa and other styles of yoga.
- This pranayama practice may be maintained throughout much of practice and, according to Iyengar, is "the only Pranayama which can be done at all times of the day and night." Other experts, however, do not recommend Ujjayi be practiced in all cases.
- The sound of Ujjayi is often used as the focal point of concentration for directing and controlling the mind.
- Because Ujjayi has to be created over and over again, a lack of focus on breath can indicate the mind has wandered.
- The sound can make it easier to identify when the breath has become erratic. This can give the student awareness and an opportunity to reduce effort, release tension, re-focus on the breath or whatever practice helps to effectively regain steadiness.



Evenness and Rhythm

Most of us think of ujjayi primarily as that sound which is made in the back of the throat, but let's look a bit more deeply into it. The real essence of ujjayi is not so much the sound that we are making (for ujjayi can be done without any sound) but in the type and quality of the breath that we are making. What we are really after is consistency in the breath: evenness and rhythm. If you look at how people breathe during the course of the day, you will notice a profound lack of evenness; the breath is fast one moment and slow the next, deep here and shallow there... The most basic key to good health and happiness, as the yogis see it, is an evenness in the prana and life-force...

The most effective thing we can do is stabilize our breathing as often as we can and for as long as possible. The way we establish this pattern is practicing ujjayi breathing for the entire length of our practice. In this way, we create awareness of our breath and our prana and consciously attempt to smooth and stabilize our energetic patterns. It is actually the most essential aspect of the yoga practice, regardless of which postures or style or system we work with, for breath and prana are our most essential functions. – Randall O'Leary

Purpose/Benefits

- SLOW DOWN THE BREATH, DIRECT THE BREATH AND LENGTHEN THE BREATH.
- INCREASE HEAT, ENERGIZE.
- INCREASE MINDFULNESS AND FOCUS.
- RELIEVE STRESS.
- SOME SAY IT CLEANSES LUNGS.
- SUPPORT STEADINESS AND ENDURANCE.
- WHEN DONE IN A SUPPORTED POSITION, IT IS SAID TO RELIEVE SYMPTOMS OF HIGH BLOOD FROM THE EXPERTS

SWAMI RAMA

This pranayama enhances the ventilation of the lungs, removes phlegm, calms the nerves, and fills the whole body with vitality. – Swami Rama

BERYL BENDER BIRCH

Ujjayi is a technique with such powerful benefits that it should be accessible to everyone. It is an essential tool that you will find yourself using in every aspect of your life. People from my classes are always writing, calling, or coming up to me to comment on the effectiveness of the breathing method and how it has helped them to raise mindfulness, birth babies, diminish stress, and appreciate life more fully.
– Beryl Bender Birch

POSE INFORMATION (continued)

GREGOR MAEHL

You will find that Ujjayi is a vital tool in slowing down the breath... Ujjayi certainly helps one to learn to direct the breath, to stretch it long and distribute it evenly to all areas of the body. However, Ujjayi breathing is only pranayama in a preparatory sense... Pranayama is formal sitting practice involving a variety of counted kumbhakas... so Ujjayi during one's asana practice is not a replacement for formal sitting kumbhaka practice but preparation for it. Ujjayi without kumbhaka cannot by itself bring about the balance of ida and pingala, which is obtained through nadi shodhana pranayama, nor can it bring about the complete cessation of fluctuations of prana, which is obtained through extensive breath retentions. – Gregor Maehle

FROM ASHTANGA YOGA

Ujjayi pranayama... provides the strength required to master every asana. The absorbed prana (energy) can also be used to facilitate body movement, allowing even Yogis with slight builds to seem able to defy gravity and glide through movements almost effortlessly. As the waves form the beach, so too does the breath form the Ashtanga Yoga practice. Your inner waves set the rhythm. The murmuring of your breath becomes the murmuring of your inner ocean while waves of inhalation flood your inner coast... Like a surfer who rides the waves of a real ocean, your inner surf carries you from asana to asana. Your breath directs each movement. – ashtangayoga.info

LISA MITCHELL

The friction of the air passing through the lungs and throat generates internal body heat. It is similar to a massage for the internal organs; as the core becomes warm from the inside, the body becomes prepared for the asana practice. – Lisa Mitchell

DR. RONALD STEINER

It is said that Yogis can melt snow by using Ujjayi breathing. You might feel heat when first applying this technique. As your practice advances the energy will become more subtle. A quiet but steady force will develop deep inside you with which you will be able to master virtually impossible physical challenges with ease. Superficially, the muscles carry the Yogi through the air. However it is the breath which provides the necessary prana (energy). – Dr. Ronald Steiner

Sanskrit

A Superior or Powerful Technique

Ujjayi means 'to win,' 'to conquer,' 'to acquire by conquest,' 'to be victorious.' The name is partly suggested, it seems, by the way the aspirant swells her chest out like a proud conqueror, in order to maximize the capacity of her lungs. Hidden in this word is the little prefix *ud*, which means 'up,' in the sense of superiority in place, rank, or power. This also suggest that ujjayi is a superior or powerful technique for liberation, a tool by which the yogis can conquer the forces of ignorance and bondage. – Richard Rosen

• "The prefix 'ud' means upwards or expanding. It also conveys the sense of preeminence and power. 'Jaya' means conquest or success, and, from another point of view, restraint." (Light on Prāṇāyāma 2010 p 123)

• "Jaya means victory. Ujjayi means victorious or conquering. It is so called because the technique allows us to become victorious in pranayama. Pranayama means extension or stretching of prana, and this is exactly what Ujjayi does." (Pranayama The Breath of Yoga p 224)

• Some say the name of Victory or Victorious is because the practice helps the mind to rise victoriously above its usually restless nature.

Going Deeper

Loud Vibration

In this technique the valve is established by a partial contraction of the glottis. This contraction is used during inhale and exhale. The sound of the vibration at the throat can be so subtle as to be inaudible even to the practitioner or loud enough to be heard by others nearby... The heating effect is intensified as the sound at the throat becomes louder. – Gary Kraftsow

A Divine Gift

As you breathe in, your body, lungs, brain, and consciousness should be receptive rather than active. Breath is received as a divine gift and should not be drawn in forcefully. – B.K.S. Iyengar

Calming & Gentle Sound

The sound is quite similar to that of a wave washing up on the shore and then washing back down again. Make sure that the sound is even, calming and gentle. If you strain, you will trigger the sympathetic nervous system and the method will not achieve its aim. – Gregor Maehle

Smooth & Unbroken

It should emerge from the upper part of your throat and not from the upper or front part of your nose. Because of the resistance of air in your throat, you will find this sound automatically being created. Stretch your inhale and the exhale as much as you can without generating tension anywhere in your body, and let the sound of the breath be smooth and unbroken. – yogawiz.com

Darth Vader from Star Wars

It is helpful to gently smile while breathing to allow the air to swirl around the back of the throat before continuing its journey to the lungs. This swirling action is what creates the unique sound which has been described as *wind in the trees*, *a distant ocean*, *a cobra snake* or, for the less poetic, *Darth Vader from Star Wars*. – David Swenson

Directions

Open Mouth Version When introducing the practice to beginners, you may wish to first teach the practice using an open mouth:

- Open mouth and exhale slowly.
- Softly whisper "hhhaha."
- Notice that the sound is like listening to the ocean in a shell.
- "Feel the air swirl in the back of the throat." (David Swenson)
- Inhale through the nose, making the same sound on inhale.
- Repeat and then, eventually, close mouth, continuing to make sound. David Swenson recommends closing mouth midway through exhale, letting air continue exiting through nose instead of mouth.
- Don't sniff. Rather, keep nostrils relaxed.

Fogging Glasses

- Another commonly used illustration is to mimic the action of "fogging up" a pair of eyeglasses.
- Feel the constriction in the throat and note the sound.

Other Instructions

- Inhale with a slight constriction of throat, feeling air on the roof of the palate.
- There is a sound like "Darth Vader," "an ocean wave," "ssss" or "snoring."
- Exhale slowly, deeply & steadily with the same constriction.
- Listen to the sound of the breath, using it as a guide to adjust and synchronize the flow and rhythm of the breath.

Inhale vs Exhale

The breath... consists of the sibilant *sah* on the inhalation and the aspirate *aham* on the exhalation. If we combine these two Sanskrit terms... we arrive at *soham*, the great mantra of prana/prakrti. *Soham* is one of the so-called *mahavakyas* (great words) of the Upanishads... Ujjayi is the constant pronunciation of a mantra that proclaims we are not that which changes and decays but that which is permanent, immutable, infinite and immortal—pure awareness. – Gregor Maehle

MOM-ASANA: FINDING THE MOMENT WITH PRANAYAMA

The best remedy for the fast pace of parenthood? Simply taking a deep breath and seeing where it goes.

INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED YOGA TEACHER AND MOTHER OF TWO JANET STONE, WHO WILL LEAD OUR UPCOMING YOGA FOR MOMS ONLINE COURSE (ENROLL NOW AND BE THE FIRST TO KNOW WHEN THIS MOM-INSPIRED COURSE LAUNCHES), IS OFFERING YJ READERS A SERIES OF WEEKLY "MOM-ASANAS" FOR STRENGTH, FITNESS, AND GROUNDING. THIS WEEK'S PRACTICE: FINDING THE MOMENT WITH PRANAYAMA.

In the hustle of all things in our society, it's no surprise that mothering has also turned into a rush. The best remedy for the fast pace of parenthood? Simply taking a deep breath and seeing where it goes, pausing to notice what capacity we may have to take a full breath and allowing it to nourish us. The ancient art of watching the breath isn't the most exciting "pose," but it's a welcome break from allowing ourselves to be ruled by the constant spin of our thoughts. So, pranayama – which may sound more complicated than it is – becomes an opportunity to reconnect with the simplicity of the inhale and the exhale, with this moment. Pranayama, simply put, is the witnessing and directing the movement of prana (life-force) through the body on the breath. In the yoga texts, pranayama is listed as the fourth limb of the eight-limbed path. It deals with both the gross body and the subtle body; just when we think we've mastered it, we realize there is another layer to dive into or through.

MOM-ASANA OF THE WEEK

My prescription for this week is the breath of Nadi Shodhana Pranayama while the body is alert, yet at ease. This is a breath to unite what we sometimes assume are opposites – desires vs. behaviors, happy vs. sad, likes vs. dislikes – allowing us to weave a full-body experience. Physiologically, it oxygenates and balances, and who couldn't use a bit of balancing? So, instead of heeding the pull of our fast-paced modern lifestyle, try pausing for a moment to balance yourself.

HOW TO: NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA

Begin in comfortable seated position. Bring your right hand into Vishnu Mudra by folding your index and middle finger of right hand toward your palm. Gently place your thumb on the right nostril and the ring finger and little finger on the left nostril.

With the thumb, close the right nostril just below the bony part of the nose and slowly inhale through the left nostril. Bring the breath high up in the nasal passage. Close the left nostril with the little and ring fingers and exhale fully and slowly through right nostril. Then, slowly inhale through the right nostril, while the left is still closed off. Close the right nostril, release the left and exhale. This is one full cycle. You can repeat for 6-10 cycles. Once you feel comfortable with the breath, you can add kumbhaka (breath retention) at both the top of the inhale and bottom of the exhale.

ABOUT JANET STONE

San Francisco-based yoga teacher Janet Stone started her practice at age 17. A student of Max Strom and meditation teacher Prem Rawat, Stone teaches vinyasa flow at events around the world. Her new kirtan album with DJ Drez, Echoes of Devotion, hit number 1 on iTunes's World Music chart this year.

Stone has two daughters and offers this advice to moms: "Motherhood offers infinite lessons in the realms of surrender, empowerment, grace, mistakes, and patience, and then some more patience—as well as the endless unfurling of transitions and change. Practicing yoga amidst this adventure can support us in myriad ways to find our center." Learn more about her upcoming course, *Yoga for Moms*.

Prana

Some say that the movement of prana, the life force, and the practice of pranayama defines yoga. Yet, do we get in touch with prana? How can we sense and feel its presence? How do we enliven it? The answer lies in the flow of breath itself. We all breathe. There is no one alive on the planet who is not breathing, and this natural process is the gateway to the inner, meditative limbs of yoga.

As an avid student of the subtle body, I designed this course so you can access the subtle movement of your own prana. Prana is not just breath but blood flow, nerve pulsation, and heartbeat. By getting in touch with your own biorhythms and expanding and strengthening them, you will experience tranquility, lightness, and space within.

I will guide you through breathing practices in yoga postures, savasana, and seated pranayama to help bring exquisite awareness to the flow of your breath. This will enable you to remain buoyant, serene, and open, even in the midst of life's demanding and stressful moments.

You'll also pick up new ideas, new techniques, and new ways of sensing and feeling the body-mind connection. My intention is for all practices to be profoundly restorative while "pranagizing" the animating spirit within.

By the end of six weeks you will come to better know your inner landscape—your pulses, prana, and flow of awareness. Whether you are a teacher, teacher-in-training, or a student, this course offers a rich exploration into the vital source of life.



Breathe

For Better Health

Pranayama Benefits or Breathing Exercise Benefits Include:

- It improves autonomic functions.
- Alleviates asthma symptoms.
- Improves your perception.
- Helps in living a long and healthy life.
- Gives you a strong will-power.

- Breathing is a part of life and is one of the most important body functions. There are Five Principles of Yoga of which one is Pranayama, which is a Breathing Exercise.
- Pranayama helps in promoting correct breathing.
- Pranayama also has many psychological benefits.

YOGIC BREATHING: CHEST TO BELLY OR BELLY TO CHEST; WHAT IS THE PROPER BREATHING TECHNIQUE?

BY OLGAKABEL: IN TEACHING TIPS - YOGA FOR YOUR ENERGY — 4 MAR, 2014

There is an ongoing discussion in the yoga community about the directionality of the breath – do you begin your inhalation in the chest and then fill the belly or do you fill up the belly first and then expand the chest? This seemingly innocent question can have yoga teachers argue till they are blue in the face. Is there a right answer? Yep, but before we get to it, let's start at the beginning.

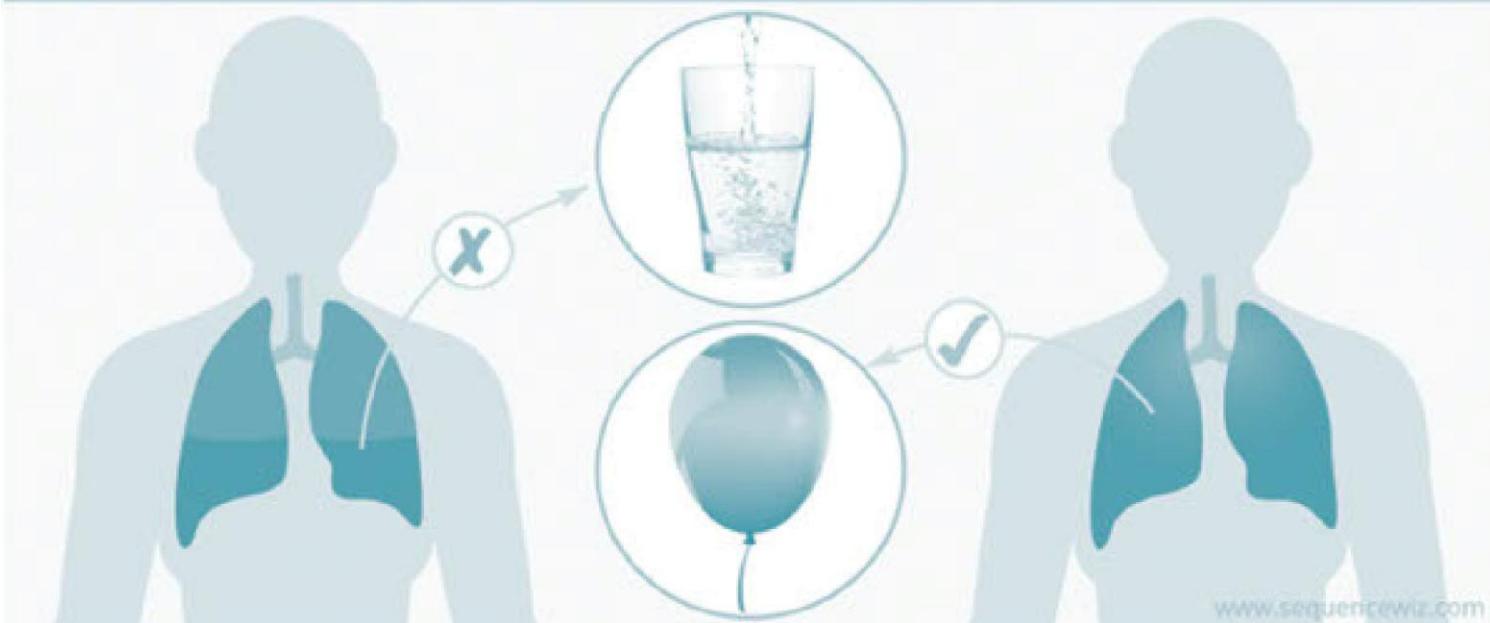
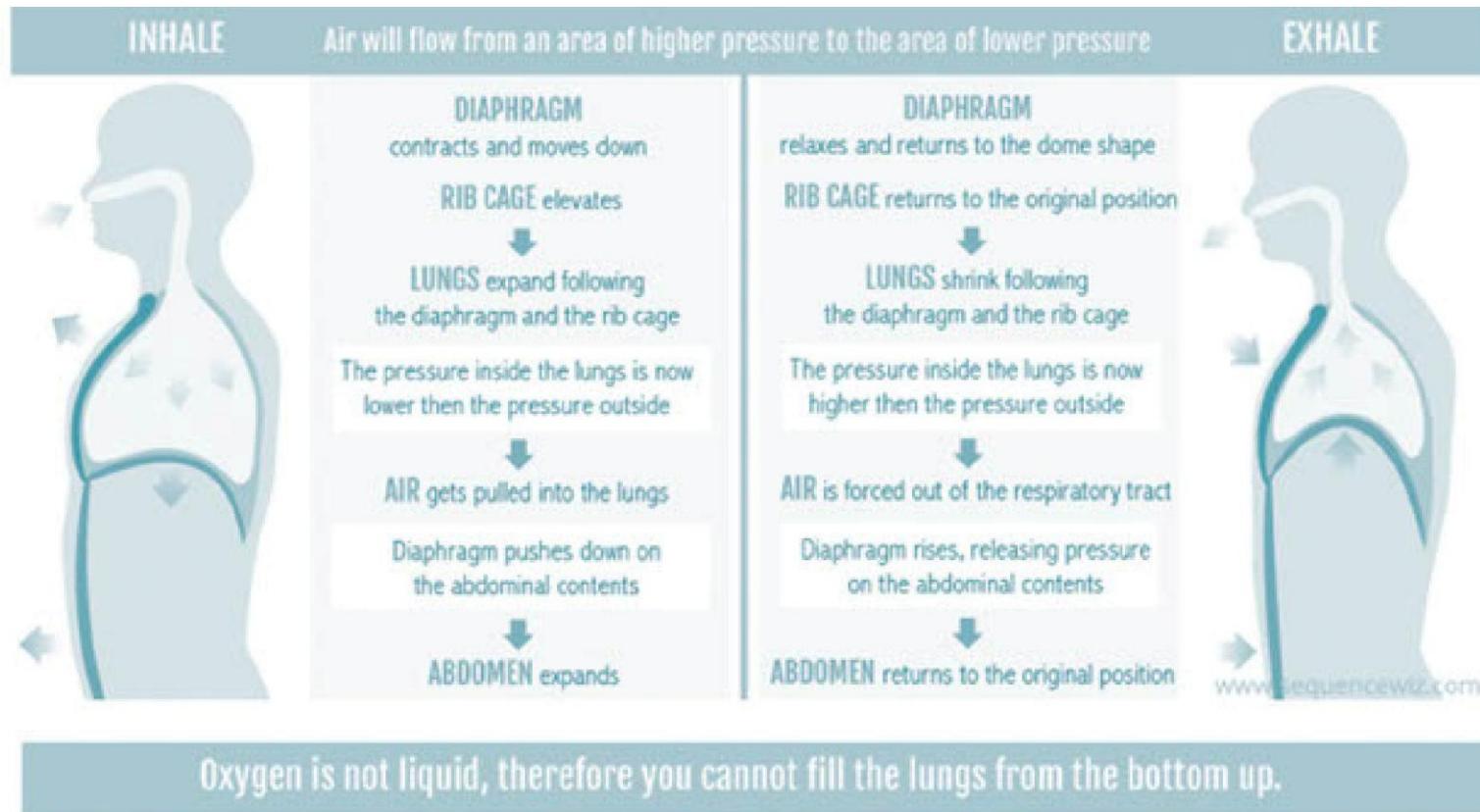
First of all, let's get our facts straight – we **CANNOT** breathe into our bellies (if the air does go into your belly, you are in deep trouble). You certainly do and should **EXPAND** your belly as you breathe in, but not because the air goes there.

To understand the intricate process of respiration, we need to know two important facts.

FACT 1: Air will flow from an area of higher pressure to the area of lower pressure

FACT 2: Lungs **DO NOT** have muscular tissue, which means that you cannot move your lungs at will. Instead the outer surface of the lungs sticks to the inner surface of the ribcage and to the top of the diaphragm; as a result, lungs get pulled following the movement of those structures. So you cannot move your lungs directly, but you **COULD** intentionally expand the ribcage and, to some degree, affect the movement of the diaphragm (because it is a muscle), which would move your lungs indirectly.

Technically here is what happens when we breathe:



The degree of movement of the diaphragm and the ribcage can vary.

- During diaphragmatic or deep breathing we rely mostly on the movement of the diaphragm; it usually occurs at minimal levels of activity.
- During costal, or shallow breathing we rely mostly on the rib cage changing its shape and is more common during higher activity levels OR when the contents of the abdominal cavity restricts the movement of the diaphragm (for example, when there is a baby there).

As you can see from this image, your abdominal cavity is packed with stuff – vital organs, digestive tract, etc. When the diaphragm moves down on the inhalation, it pushes down on your abdominal content and it has no other place to go but forward, so your belly pushes forward.

So far we have described the natural pattern of breath: when you breathe in, your chest and your belly both expand **AT THE SAME TIME**; when you breathe out, both of them return back to the original shape. Now, we **CAN** use muscular control to change that pattern, consciously or unconsciously. One of the examples of unconscious muscular interference is an unfortunate pattern of “reverse breathing”, when we pull the belly in on the inhale, instead of pushing it out. So if you are keeping your abdomen taut on the inhalation, you are preventing your abdominal contents from moving forward, which means that it will stay where it is and restrict the movement of the diaphragm. So you will end up relying on your rib cage instead; if you do it consistently over time your diaphragm might lose some of its elasticity causing shorter and shallower breathing (and who wants that?!)

When we decide to change the natural pattern consciously, we might **CHOOSE** to expand the belly first and then expand the chest or we might **CHOOSE** to expand the chest first and then expand the belly. Both are voluntary actions done for a number of reasons:



Inhale – Expand the belly first then the chest

- To emphasize the movement of the diaphragm
- To try to overcome “reverse breathing” pattern
- To produce a grounding effect on the system



Inhale – Expand the chest first then the belly

- To lengthen the spine and improve posture
- To gradually deepen the breath
- To have a more uplifting effect on the system

Your exhalation can either be passive or active. With passive exhalation, the muscles that's been contracting on the inhale relax and return to their original position. With active exhalation you use your abdominal muscles to compress the abdomen and force the diaphragm upward. If you do your abdominal contraction in a gradual fashion as you exhale, it will help stabilize and support your lower back (read more about the progressive abdominal contraction). And of course, yogis were very interested in the energetic effects of the breath. Breath is a vehicle for prana, the vital force, that runs in different currents throughout the body. According to Bhagavad Gita, every breath cycle is an opportunity to link PRANA and APANA – two primary currents of the life force.

Apama

which is aligned with the force of gravity, moves downward resulting in elimination of wastes, as well as disease, aging, death and the diminution of consciousness. Prana, which is aligned with the air and space elements is meant to move downward and is responsible for everything we take into the body – food, water, experiences and information. But it can disperse upward through the mind and senses, especially in this age of sensory and information overload. This leads to loss of mind-body coordination and devitalization. Uniting these two primary vayus results in strengthening our energy along with awakening our higher faculties. Yogic practices work to raise apana up to unite with prana and draw prana down to unite with apana, which occurs in the region of the navel – the pranic center in the body.

To unite prana and apana, we would focus on the **SYMBOLIC** downward movement of the breath on the inhalation (nose – throat – chest – belly), facilitated by intentional muscular contraction, and **SYMBOLIC** upward movement of the breath on the exhalation (using progressive abdominal contraction from the pubic bone toward the navel and then compressing the rib cage).

So to go back to our original question – what is the proper breathing technique – chest to belly or belly to chest – the answer is: It depends! It depends on what you are trying to accomplish.

