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COMMUNITY VITALITY LONGEVITY

Breath

Our life force, our prana, the very thing that fuels our cells with oxygen is the one thing that many of us have trouble doing. Oxygen is necessary not just for survival, but for us to thrive and be the best version of ourselves, in body and mind. Often, we are stuck in a survival state just moving through our day and notice after the long email or the long day that we haven't actually taken a moment to exhale and just breathe.

The secret to longevity, that yogis and chi gong masters have known for thousands of years, is essentially their ability to use their breath in an efficient, purposeful manner to support healing and vitality.

Here we share with you some breath work you can incorporate into your morning bliss routine or your evening zen routine to get back in your body and into your breath.

Breath of Fire (Agni Pran)

This is considered the foundational breath work practice in Kundalini Yoga. Its rapid, rhythmic and continuous where you have an equal inhale and exhale, with no pause in between. You typically have your mouth closed and use the nostrils for both inhale and exhale. For those that are new to this kind of breath work its easier to stick the tongue out and pant like a dog.

This breathing is powered by the navel point and the solar plexus, when exhaling the air is expelled by pressing the navel point and the solar plexus back towards the spine, if you contract the diaphragm rapidly this seems to feel automatic.

Benefits:

- Strengthens the nervous system to resist stress.
- Expands lung capacity and increases vital strength.
- Increases the delivery of oxygen to the brain.
- Helps balance the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana)

Nadi Shodhana means “clearing the channels of circulation”, this breathing is particularly helpful when experiencing anxiety, stress or sleep issues. There are different styles (depending on hand positions and fingers used) but they all serve the purpose of balancing and regulating air flow and create ease in both mind and body.

Follow these steps to experience with one of the styles of alternate nostril breathing:

- Sit in a tall seat making sure your spine is straight, by tucking your chin slightly, and shoulders are back opening your heart.
- Relax your left hand in your lap and bring your right hand in front of your face.
- With your right hand, close your right nostril with your right thumb and inhale through the left nostril slow and steady.
- Close your left nostril with your ring finger so both nostrils are held closed, hold that breath for a brief second.
- Open your right nostril and release the breath slowly through the right side.
- Repeat the last 3 steps at least 5 times.

Box breath

This breathing technique is also called square breathing as it consists in inhaling and exhaling for the same count as well as holding the breath on the inhale and exhale for the same count as well. Some of the benefits associated with this type of breathing are improved heart health, mental clarity, reduce anxiety and depression and improve sleep.

The most common is the 4-count box breathing, this is how to do it:

- Inhale through the nose for a count of four
- Hold the air in your lungs for a count of four
- Exhale through the mouth for a count of four
- Hold the lungs in an empty state for a count of four.
- Repeat at least 5 times.

Once you master the 4-count box breathing you can try the 8-count box breathing which is the same just inhaling, exhaling and holding for a count of 8 instead of 4.

Meditation for a calm heart

Check out our additional resources for more details on this meditation.

Ego Eradicator

This exercise can be done on both easy pose or rock pose. You want to raise your arms up to a 60 degree angle, keeping the elbows straight and shoulders down. The fingertips are curled on to the pads of the palms at the base of the fingers and the thumbs are stretched back, pointing towards each other. You want to do this exercise while using the breath of fire breathing and while your eyes are closed focused on the brow point.

This exercise helps expand lung capacity, increase vital energy, help clear the mind while balancing and restoring the nervous system. Amazing to release blockages around the third and fourth chakras.

Sitali Breath

This type of breathing is also known as the cooling breath because we are drawing the air across the tongue and into the mouth creating a calming effect on our nervous system.

To practice this breathing you need to be able to curl the sides of your tongue inward so it looks like a straw. If you cant do this movement, as it is a genetic trait, there is an alternative technique called Sitkari Pranayama.

Once you are in a comfortably sitting position you want to in hale gently through the "straw" formed by your curled tongue as you slowly lift your chin towards the ceiling as far as the neck feels comfortable. At the end of the inhalation, retract your tongue and close the mouth, exhale slowly trough the nostrils as you slowly lower your chin back to neutral position. Repeat 8-10 times.

The benefits from this type of breathing go from reducing anxiety to helping those who suffer from insomnia and sleep disturbances.