

Alternate Nostril Breathing - Nadi Shodhana

You may have practiced this 'pranayama' or breathing exercise in yoga class but take note that these instructions might be a little different. I like to call this 'Balanced Breathing.' There is no retention of the breath and you breathe equally on both sides.

Nadi Shodhana means cleansing breath: shodhana = cleansing and nadi = our subtle energy channels that prana moves through. You can think of this breath as clearing or cleansing your mind. Practice this before meditation to quiet your mind-chatter and create the conditions for a more peaceful meditation. You can also just do this pranayama in place of meditation- and experiment with simply sitting quietly for a few minutes when you are done.

Instructions:

Sit upright, in a comfortable position - either cross legged on the floor or in a chair with both feet flat on the floor. Do make sure that you are comfortable and that your spine is extended.

Close your eyes and take a couple of nice, relaxing breaths, in and out through the nose. Gently blow your nose if you need to.

You will be closing off one nasal passage at a time, using either your ring or middle finger or thumb of your right hand. You will always (only) switch sides just before you exhale. Always begin and end with the left side - as that is the cooling calming nadi and we want that aspect of our mind activated.

Simply fold the first one or two fingers of your right hand down. Exhale completely through both sides. Use your thumb to gently close your right nostril. Breathe in through your left nostril. Close your left nostril using your ring or middle finger. Breathe out through your right nostril. Breathe in through your right nostril. Close your right nostril and breathe out through your left. Breathe in through your left. Breathe out through your right. Continue.

5-10 minutes is best. Start with 8 complete rounds and increase from there.

Use a comfortable, natural breath. Relax a little more with each breath. When you find your mind wandering (it will!!) just kindly bring it back to your breath. Cultivating this one-pointed attention on your breath will greatly increase the benefits.

Don't worry if it's a little confusing at first! You'll get it! If you get off track it's no big deal, just switch before your next exhale. If it is hard to breathe through one side of your nose, be gentle, just do your best. This cleansing breath will help to clear that channel over time if you are gentle, consistent and persistent. Keeping the nasal passages supple and lubricated with Nasya oil is also helpful.