



Nerves of Steel — Where Can I Get Mine?

Right here, starting right now! We'll discuss three very important breathing exercises (pranayama) and some of their specific benefits. Controlling the breath helps control the emotions, which in turn controls the body's response to stress. When you feel better in your body, mind and spirit, it makes the quality of your life and your relationships better, as well.

Get Ready for a Super-Hero Breathing Workout!

Come into a seated position on the floor or sit in a chair with a straight back, feet on the floor. Bring the hands into *gyan mudra*, with the index and thumb touching to make a circle, and then place the wrists on the knees with the palms facing up toward the ceiling. Center yourself by reciting the mantra *Ong Namō Guru Dev Namō* three times. This mantra means "Salutations to the Teacher outside and the Wisdom within." It also creates a protective field around your practice.

Long Deep Breathing: For many of us, our tendency is to breathe quickly and shallowly, creating chronic tension, which results in weakened nerves. Long deep breathing helps you to build patience, endurance and a stronger nervous system, helping you to stay calm and remain centered when times are difficult.

To begin, place your right hand gently over the navel. Begin by pushing the navel point outward and then filling the lungs with prana from the abdomen upward. You are filling up the belly from the bottom up. Belly rises, then ribs expand, then the chest expands.

Inhale through the nostrils. Feel the belly rise up under your right hand, like a [balloon filling with air](#). Savor the breath for a moment. Exhale out, feeling the right hand move back in towards the spine as the belly falls back. Completely release all breath from the lungs. Hold the breath out for a few seconds. Savor the emptiness. Practice this breath 26 times. Resume normal breathing and check in with yourself. How do you feel now? Breathe long and deep as often as you can during the day to stay peaceful and do it again at night to relax into a good night's sleep.

Alternate Nostril Breathing: I call this one the brain restorer and nerve tonic breath. If you practice a few rounds of alternate nostril breathing for a few minutes each day, you can help restore balance in your brain. You can improve sleep, encourage a calmer emotional state, boost your thinking power and soothe your nervous system. I recommend this breath for people who suffer from anxiety attacks or severe stress. It is incredibly helpful for quickly and deeply relaxing the nerves.

Breathing through your left nostril accesses the right hemisphere of your brain, which deals with feelings. Breathing in through the right nostril accesses the left hemisphere of your brain, which deals with thinking. By consciously alternating your breath between the nostrils, you activate your whole brain so that both sides are working equally. This can really help you get through rough spots in your day.

To begin, exhale through the nose. Use your right thumb to close off right nostril. Inhale slowly through left nostril. The stomach expands fully as you fill up with air. Retain for a second. Now close your left nostril with ring finger and release your thumb off right nostril. Exhale through your right nostril as the stomach falls back toward the spine. Inhale through the right nostril. Retain. Use your thumb to close off the right nostril. Breathe out through the left nostril. To finish, release the hand to the lap, inhale through the nose and exhale through the nose. Resume normal breathing and check in with yourself. How do you feel now?

Sitali Pranayam: Known as the cooling breath, Sitali enables you to cool down, relax, control your appetite and prevent headaches. It soothes and cools the spine in the area of the fourth, fifth and sixth vertebrae, which helps to regulate the sexual and digestive energy. It helps to reduce excess heat in the body. This breath is often used for lowering fever and is said to help keep you alive if you've suffered a venomous snakebite because it cools the blood.

Great powers of rejuvenation and detoxification are attributed to this breath when practiced regularly. Doing 52 breaths daily is said to extend your lifespan. When you first begin breathing this way, your tongue may taste bitter as the toxins begin to leave the body. As you continue the practice the bitterness leaves and the taste of your tongue will become pleasant.

To begin, exhale through the nose. Curl the tongue and protrude it boldly past the lips. Inhale deeply and smoothly through the tongue and mouth as the stomach expands. You should audibly hear your breath as you bring it through the tongue and into the lungs. Bring the tongue back into the mouth and exhale out through the nose as the belly falls back towards the spine. Resume normal breathing and check in with yourself. How do you feel now?

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