

Prāṇāyāma

Alternate Nostril Breathing for Whole Brain Activation

By the Yogis of India

This text written by John Vincent

Caution:

Always go at your own pace and stop if you feel faint or dizzy.

Do not hold your breath if you have high blood pressure.

Do not practice Kapalabhati if you currently have high blood pressure, heart disease, a hernia or any other condition you think may affect you.

Always check with a health practitioner before starting any new health regimes.

Always approach breathing exercises with caution, especially if you have any respiratory condition such as asthma or emphysema.

Copyright 2014

John Vincent has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the sole author of this work.

Benefits of Alternate Nostril Breathing

- Improves whole brain function
- Cleanses and revitalises your lungs
- Promotes a calmer emotional state
- Improves restorative sleep
- Deepens meditative states
- Calms nervous system
- Enhances rest and relaxation

Prāṇāyāma is a Sanskrit word. Prana the first part of the word means 'life force' or 'vital energy'. The second part 'ayāma' means to extend or draw out. This translates into: extension of the *prāṇa* (or breath) and extension of the life force.

Starting your day with alternate nostril breathing removes stale air from the bottom of your lungs. When you breathe in this way you oxygenate your cells, your blood flow becomes more efficient at delivering oxygen and carrying away waste. It also stimulates your lymphatic system and improves your digestive system.

Research studies carried out have reported Prāṇāyāma as beneficial in treating stress, relieving symptoms of asthma, and improving autonomic functions.

And the people who actually practice Prāṇāyāma say: *it develops a clear mind, strong and focused thoughts and calmer mind and body.*

Regular practice of Alternate Nostril Breathing will boost your parasympathetic nervous system and lowers blood pressure.

This is a whole brain thinking technique.

Breathing in each nostril separately activates different sides of the brain. When you breathe in through your left nostril the right hand side of your brain is activated and vice versa. Waking up and doing this Alternate Nostril Breathing activates your whole brain.

Many people in the west tend to be more 'left brained' in their thinking but this simple breathing technique will help you to shift to a more balanced whole brain thinking.

Surprisingly you don't breathe equally through both nostrils all the time. At different points of the day you breathe through one nostril more than the other. Alternate Nostril Breathing helps bring balance to your breathing.



Now I want to share this whole brain activation technique that I learnt from a Baba in Goa with you. A Sādhu or Baba is the name for a holy man in India. They lead a very simple life shunning the complexities of modern day life in favour of a spiritual path.

Most of the people who trekked through the jungle to see the Baba, brought him a gift (food and drink that he shared with everyone), then they sat there for a few minutes and left without speaking with him.

Baba doesn't talk unless you ask him a question, but when you do ask him a question he will talk and has many answers for you. In that first visit I spent a considerable time talking with him (five hours), asking him questions, talking, sharing ideas and even doing some NLP with him! Now I want to share this simple exercise with you.



Sat under the Banyan Tree, learning from the charismatic Baba

Whole Brain Activation: Alternate Breathing Technique

- Place your index and middle finger of your left hand between your eyebrows, you use your thumb to close your left nostril and your ring finger to close your right nostril (but only one at a time).
- First, close your right nostril with your ring finger and breathe in through the left nostril.
- Then, releasing your right nostril, close your left nostril with your thumb and breathe out through the right nostril.
- Once you have fully exhaled breathe in through the right nostril.
- Then close off the right nostril and breathe out through the left nostril, then breathe in through the left nostril.
- Swap sides again repeating for five minutes (when you first start you might like to do this for 2 - 3 minutes and build up to five).



Tips for Alternate Breathing Technique

- It is best to do Alternate Nostril Breathing on an empty stomach.
- Your setting is also very important, it is best to choose a place (preferably outside) that is peaceful.
- Alternatively you can make your indoor space calm and quiet maybe using some gentle nature sounds in the background (see bonus section for a free nature sound Tranquil Waterfall).
- Sit comfortably either cross-legged or kneeling with your spine straight (I have seen some people suggest that you do Prāṇāyāma while walking, but this is not a good idea).
- Have an inner smile, one that spills over to the outside.

Baba explained that sometimes when he wakes (before dawn) he still feels he is half asleep and that this simple breathing technique wakes up both sides of his brain. Breathing through the right nostril activates the left side of the brain, and when you switch to the right side you activate the left side of the brain.

This whole brain exercise is one designed to really wake you up for the day. I know because I've been doing it when I wake, to fully energise and wake me up.

“Fifteen to twenty times in the morning is enough to blow away the cobwebs and wake you right up for a more productive day. Five minutes for the full benefit of the whole brain breathing technique.”

For thousands of years Indian Babas have believed that many diseases are connected to disturbed nasal breathing.

Alternate nostril breathing is an amazingly simple technique you can use for a few minutes before your meditation practice to get a deeper and more relaxed meditation. It really helps get you into the right state of mind to meditate. Or you can use it to relax before going into a mind reprogramming hypnosis session.

Different Types of Alternative Nostril Breathing

The first variation you can try is to inhale for the count of four, hold for the count of four, then exhale for the count of four and repeat. A different variation of this adds a hold for the count of four after the exhalation.

Another variation (and one I rather like) is to inhale rapidly for the count of two, hold for the count of eight and exhale for the count of four.

Anuloma is another variation of Alternate Nostril Breathing. For this you inhale through both nostrils at the same time and then exhale alternately from the left nostril and right nostril.

Inverted Anuloma breathing, called **Pratiloma**, is where you inhale through alternating nostrils and exhale through both of them at the same time.

Before you do your Alternate Nostril Breathing you might like to spend a minute doing a different breathing technique called Kapalabhati.

Kapalabhati - is like a warm up for Alternate Nostril Breathing

- Sit in a comfortable position with your spine straight and your abdomen relaxed.
- Inhale through both nostrils.
- Then contract your abdomen forcing out the breath quickly.
- As you finish you sharply inhale, you should aim for this to become automatic and passive.
- Aim for 60 - 70 repetitions per minute.
- Do this for one minute.