

## ***Breathe Into Relaxation with Pranayama***

This breathing exercise is based on one of the ancient yogic practices of pranayama. “Prana” is Sanskrit for life force, and “yama” refers to action. So, it is an action of the life force, a drawing in of the life force and engaging with it. There are many different types of pranayama exercises, but my favorite is alternate nostril breathing. Alternate nostril breathing is designed to get us to focus on the breath while balancing our breathing between the two nostrils.

The hands are held in what is called a “mudra.” The idea of a mudra is to lock in the sensation or benefits of a practice. The theory is that, with time, you can capture the benefits so well within the mudra that, eventually, placing the hands in the mudra alone will give the benefits of the practice. The mudra for alternate nostril breathing is to fold the first 2 fingers of the right hand downwards toward the palm.

~The left hand is held with the tip of the thumb and first finger pressed together and resting on the knee. Close your eyes and get ready to relax.

~ Using the thumb of the right hand, press the right nostril closed and take a deep breath in through the left nostril. This is usually done to a count of four (see the first photo below).

~ After counting to four, close both nostrils by bringing the pinky and ring finger of the right hand to press against the left nostril. Hold your breath in this position for a count of sixteen (see the middle photo below).

~ At the end of sixteen seconds, release the thumb from the right nostril and breathe out to a count of eight seconds (see the last photo below).

~ Continue to do this process by then leaving the thumb off of the right nostril so that it can breathe in.

~ Hold both nostrils again and then release the left nostril to breathe out.

~ Breathe in through the left nostril, hold, and breathe out through the right.

~ Breathe in through the right nostril, hold, and breathe out through the left.

~ Continue to do this for nine rounds.

Doing these counts (four-sixteen-eight) may be hard at first. I would encourage you to start by counting two-eight-four, and build up. Try to do this at least once per day and notice the calming effect.



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