

NADA YOGA TECHNIQUES FOR PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF BREATHING DISORDERS

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INTRODUCTION:

Chanting has always been an important aspect of the spiritual life in India. Chanting Mantras, performing Japa, singing Bhajans and the use of Nada Pranayamas such as the Bhramari and the Pranava are important parts of the Yogic life.

Recent studies have shown that chanting creates sound vibrations that encourage air to move back and forth between the sinus membranes and nasal passages. This air movement helps open the tiny ducts, or ostia, that connect the nose to the sinuses, allowing the sinuses to drain properly. This can help prevent infections from settling down in the sinuses and create a healthy environment therein. All the sinuses are effectively ventilated by humming and this is an important benefit as previous research has shown that poor sinus ventilation increases the risk for sinusitis. When the sinuses are well ventilated infections have no chance of settling down at all.

A study done by Jon Lundberg and Eddie Weitzberg of the Karolinska Institute in Sweden has shown that the daily humming or "Om" chanting may actually prevent infections from taking hold. They found that humming increased nitric oxide levels fifteenfold, compared to quiet exhalations without sound. The exhalations of people with healthy sinuses tend to have high nitric oxide levels, indicating that more air is able to flow between the sinuses and the nose.

The Nada Pranayamas such as the Bhramari and the Pranava are similar to the humming used in these studies. In the Bhramari Pranayama the nasal sound like a bee is used while in the Pranava Pranayama, the humming sounds of the Pranava A-U-M are used. This new light on humming and nasal ventilation can explain the scientific basis by which these Pranayamas can prevent as well as help in the management of sinusitis. This is another reason why practices like the Surya Namaskar should always be done with the chanting of the Surya Mantras and another reason why the chanting of the Mantras and scriptures should be encouraged in Yoga therapy and training.

This paper details eight of the important techniques that use Nada or vibrational sound to produce healing effects in those suffering from breathing disorders the upper and lower respiratory pathways. They can also be used as a preventive measure in children to prevent such conditions from occurring later on in their life too.

VARIOUS USEFUL PRACTICAL NADA YOGA TECHNIQUES:

I. NASARGA MUKHA BHASTRIKA: Nasarga Mukha Bhastrika is a forceful expulsion of the breath through the mouth that can accompany different movements to relieve our pent up stress. Take up a comfortable standing position and then start to shake your hands as vigorously as possible to help loosen up the accumulated tensions of your daily life. Visualize all the tensions that have accumulated in your wrist and elbow joints getting a good 'shake up' by this action. When you have got the tensions loosened up, take in a deep breath through your nose and clench your fist as if catching hold of all your tensions and stress. Now with a powerful blast through your mouth "whoosh" away all your accumulated tensions and stress as forcibly as possible. Again shake your hands as fast as possible. Breathe in and catch hold of the tension in your fist. Throw it all away with a blast. Make sure that you are using your diaphragm muscle vigorously while blasting out the breath in this practice. Perform this practice 3, 6 or 9 times as necessary. After performing 3 to 9 rounds of this practice, relax in the standing position and enjoy the feeling of relief that sweeps through your arms as you relax with some deep breathing.

II. HAKARA KRIYA: This activating practice combines the use of movement with sound to give vent to pent-up emotional and mental stress by way of an effective release. It is also a good Yoga warm up. Stand in the Samasthiti Asana with your arms by your side. Breathe in and at the same time jump with your legs apart while clapping your hands over your head. Breathe out and make the explosive sound HA while jumping back to the standing position with the feet together and hands by the side. Do this six to nine times in a vigorous manner. Hakara is the production of the HA sound which is related to the solar plexus. This plexus of nerves at the top of the abdomen is one of the centres where stress tends to accumulate. The strengthening of this area prevents the "butterflies in the stomach" feeling that occurs whenever we are stressed out. After completing the practice relax back in the Samasthiti Asana and perform deep and controlled breathing for a few minutes. Enjoy the rejuvenating feeling as the energetic circulation of fresh blood rushes through your entire body.

III. MALLA KRIYA: This activity is loosely based upon the warm ups done by Indian wrestlers to prepare them to face the battle. It involves the use of the forceful Bhastrika breathing in synchrony with movement from the standing to the squatting position. Stand in the Samasthiti Asana and clasp your elbows in front of your chest with the right hand on the left arm and the left hand on the right arm. Take a deep breath in and then blast the breath out with a 'whoosh' and at the same time come down to the squatting Utkat Asana. Breathe in and at the same time come back up to the standing position. Blast out the breath and go into the Utkat Asana. Breathe in and come back up to the standing position. Blast out and go into the Utkat Asana. Perform at least 9 rounds of this practice. At the end of the Malla Kriya relax in the Utkat Asana, the squatting posture that is valuable for the proper functioning of our

abdominal and pelvic organs that make up our digestive and urinary systems. Your feet should be as flat to the ground as possible. Wind your arms tightly around your legs as if embracing yourself. Give yourself a good hug and feel the pressure that is generated in the abdominal region. All the organs are given a good massage and the whole digestive and urinary systems are invigorated. When ready release the posture and come into any sitting position. Enjoy the renewed circulation of fresh blood into your abdomen and pelvis. Utkat Asana is valuable for those suffering stress disorders such as diabetes mellitus, indigestion, irritable bowel syndrome, peptic ulceration and impotency.

IV. KUKKRIYA PRANAYAMA: Kukkriya Pranayama, the dog pant breath is an excellent cleanser and tones up the diaphragm and the abdominal organs that are in close approximation to the diaphragm. Sit in Vajrasana with the weight of your body firmly on both heels. Place your palms on the ground in front with your wrists touching your knees and the fingers pointing forward. Open your mouth wide and push your tongue out as far as possible. Breathe in and out at a rapid rate with your tongue hanging out of your mouth. After 10 or 15 rounds relax back into the Vajrasana and feel the blood flow into your abdominal area. Repeat the whole practice three more times.

V. BHUJANGINI MUDRA: To perform the Cobra gesture, take up the Unmukha Asana which is a prone position with your entire body in a straight line. In this technique the emphasis is on the breathing pattern and the production of a mighty hissing sound through the clenched teeth. Slowly bring your arms forward and keep your palms on the ground alongside your shoulders. Take in a deep breath. While making a mighty hissing sound, flare back into the Bhujanga Asana. Slowly relax back onto the floor while breathing in and then again flare back with a mighty hiss. Repeat this Mudra at least three to six times at each session. This technique helps release the pent up stress that accumulates in our system from our daily life and provides great emotional and mental relief. It is an excellent stress-buster and is a must for all in this day and age. After completing the practice come back down to the face prone pose. Place your arms alongside your body and turn your head to the side. Relax for a few minutes and let the benefit of this Mudra seep into each and every cell of your body.

VI. BHARAMARI PRANAYAMA: Bhramari is one of the Swara Pranayamas and helps tone up the nervous system thus producing a state of extreme calmness and bliss. Sit on your heels in the Vajrasana with your spine erect. Perform Shanmuki Mudra with your thumbs closing the external auditory canals. The first two fingers are then placed over the closed eyelids while the ring fingers regulate the flow of air through the nostrils. The little fingers are placed over the closed lips. This Mudra helps in uniting the energies of the nerves of the hands with the facial and trigeminal nerves of the face. Take in a slow and deep breath in for six counts. Then let out the breath very slowly while making a sound in the nasal passages like the high-pitched sound of a female bee. Perform nine rounds of this practice and then release your hands back to

your thighs and enjoy a few minutes of deep contemplation while sitting in the Vajrasana.

VII. BRAHMA MUDRA: Brahma Mudra is a gesture of the head and neck and is an excellent practice for one and all. Take up any comfortable sitting position such as Vajrasana with your spine as erect as possible. Rest your hands on your lap while performing the Yoga Mudra. Close your eyes and concentrate on this valuable practice that combines the use of physical movement synchronized with deep breathing and the usage of Nada or vibrational sounds involving utterance of the Bija sounds of AAA, UUU, EEE and MMM. Brahma Mudra is an excellent practice to prevent as well as relieve disorders of the head, neck and upper shoulder areas. It is important to concentrate on the area to be relieved, repaired, or rejuvenated while sounding the Bija Mantras.

VIII. PRANAVA PRANAYAMA AND DHYANA: This practice is a one pointed concentration on the form and Nada or sound of the sacred Pranava AUM, known as the Mantra of all Mantras. This can be done from any of the sitting postures but make sure that your back is erect. It is best to do this after performing a few rounds of conscious deep breathing so that the mind is in a calm state. Pranava Dhyana harmonizes the body, emotions and mind. It is an important part of the Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga tradition as taught by Yogamaharishi Dr Swami Gitananda Giri. In this practice emphasis is first placed on making the sounds AAA, UUU and MMM separately and then in combination. This is followed by the performance of the practice mentally without the audible sound. A performance of three to nine rounds of the Pranava Dharana when done daily helps to relax the Body-Emotion-Mind complex and provides complete healing through the production of healing vibrations at all levels of our existence. This is the cornerstone of Yogic breath therapy and can produce health and wellbeing for all. When the concentrative aspect of the practice is taken to its peak, a state of mediation or Pranava Dhyana can ensue.

CONCLUDING WORDS:

Yoga is fast becoming the "IN" thing all over the world but in our haste to regain health and well being through the various techniques of Yoga Chikitsa we must not forget that Yoga is all about "life" and is not merely a set of techniques to be applied blindly. We must take into consideration all the following aspects that are part of an integrated approach to the problem. These include a healthy life nourishing diet, a healthy and natural environment, a wholistic lifestyle, adequate bodywork through Asanas, Mudras and Kriyas, invigorating breath work through the use of Pranayama and the production of a healthy thought process through the higher practices of Jnana and Raja Yoga.

When such an approach is used, Yoga can for sure, help regain the ease we had lost earlier through dis-ease (as implied by *sthira sukham asanam*-Yoga Darshan II: 46). It can also enable us to attain a dynamic state of mental equanimity (*samatvam yoga*

uchyate- Bhagavad Gita II: 48) where the opposites cease to affect us any more (*tato dhwandwa anabhigatha*- Yoga Darshan II: 48). This enables us to move from a state of illness and disease to one of health and wellbeing that ultimately allows us to move from a lower animal nature to a higher human nature and finally reach the highest Divine Nature that is our birthright.

SUGGESTED READING AND VIEWING:

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