

RANJANA YOGA CLASS

Pranayama

A Beginner's Breathing Guide

Five gentle breathing practices, how to build a daily routine, and clear safety notes

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General education only. Not medical advice. Speak with your doctor before starting any new practice.

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1. What pranayama is

Pranayama is the yoga practice of breathing with attention. The word joins prana, often translated as "life force" or breath, and ayama, meaning to extend or to guide. In plain terms: you slow the breath down, make it smooth, and watch it.

Breathing is the one body function that runs on its own and can also be steered by choice. That is why it has been used for a very long time as a doorway into a calmer mind. Slow, even breathing is a simple way to give the mind something steady to follow.

The short answer

Pranayama is guided breathing. Beginners should start with easy, unforced breath practices, never hold the breath, and stop if they feel dizzy. Stronger techniques belong with a qualified teacher.

What this guide covers

- Five gentle practices that suit most healthy adults.
- A ten-minute routine you can repeat daily.
- A four-week plan that builds slowly.
- Clear signs to stop, and who should see a doctor first.

It does not cover forceful techniques in detail, and it does not make health claims. Breath practices can help many people feel more relaxed, but they are not a treatment for any condition.

2. Before you begin: safety first

Gentle breathing is suitable for most healthy adults. Because breath practice changes how you feel, a few people need to take extra care.

Speak with your doctor first if you:

- are pregnant or have recently given birth;
- have high or low blood pressure, a heart condition, or have had a stroke;
- have asthma, a lung condition, or have had a recent chest or abdominal operation;
- have epilepsy, a history of fainting, or an eye condition such as glaucoma;
- are managing anxiety, panic attacks, or any mental health condition;
- are unsure whether breath work is right for you.

If your doctor agrees, you can describe the plan clearly: slow, easy breathing for ten minutes a day, without breath holding or forceful breaths.

Stop and breathe normally if you notice:

- dizziness, light-headedness, or tingling in the hands or face;
- chest pain, a racing heart, or breathlessness that does not settle;
- sudden anxiety or strong emotion that feels unpleasant;
- pain anywhere in the body.

Return to ordinary breathing and rest. If symptoms continue, stop and seek medical advice.

Three rules for this whole guide

1. Never strain. The breath should feel easy. 2. Do not hold the breath. 3. Practise on an empty stomach or two hours after a meal.

3. Posture and set-up

Sit so that your spine is tall without effort and your belly and ribs are free to move. A chair with both feet flat on the floor is as good as sitting on the floor.

Check	What to look for
Spine	Tall and natural, not stiff.
Shoulders	Soft and dropped away from the ears.
Jaw and face	Relaxed. Let the tongue rest in the mouth.
Hands	Resting on the thighs, palms up or down.
Eyes	Closed, or open and soft toward the floor.

Choose a quiet spot where you will not be disturbed for ten minutes. Practise at roughly the same time each day. Early morning and the quiet hour before bed suit most people.

4. Practice 1: natural breath awareness

Begin every session here. You do not change the breath. You only watch it.

- Sit comfortably and close your eyes.
- Notice the air moving in and out through the nose.
- Notice where you feel the breath most: nostrils, chest, or belly.
- When your mind wanders, which it will, gently return to the breath.

Two minutes is enough. This practice teaches you to notice the breath without judging it.

5. Practice 2: three-part breath

Three-part breath (dirga pranayama) uses the whole lung, from the belly to the upper chest, in one smooth wave.

- Place one hand on your belly and one on your chest.
- Breathe in slowly. Let the belly expand first, then the ribs widen, then the upper chest lift slightly.
- Breathe out slowly, in the same order, belly last.
- Keep the breath smooth. There should be no gap or jerk between the parts.

Practise for two to three minutes. If you feel light-headed, return to natural breathing. Never fill the lungs to the point of strain.

6. Practice 3: alternate nostril breathing

Alternate nostril breathing (nadi shodhana) is a classic practice found in many traditions. Keep it slow and light, and do not hold the breath.

- Rest your left hand on your left thigh. Raise your right hand and fold the first two fingers toward the palm.
- Close the right nostril with the right thumb. Breathe in slowly through the left nostril.
- Close the left nostril with the ring finger, open the right, and breathe out slowly through the right.
- Breathe in through the right, close it, open the left, and breathe out through the left. That is one round.
- Make the inhale and exhale about the same length. Aim for five rounds to start.

If your nose is blocked or you feel dizzy

Skip the nostril closing and return to natural breathing. Never force air through a blocked nostril.

7. Practice 4: soft ocean breath

Ocean breath (ujjayi) adds a faint, steady sound, like distant waves. The sound gives your attention something to follow.

- Breathe in through the nose.
- As you breathe out, slightly narrow the back of the throat, as if gently fogging a mirror, but with the mouth closed.
- Keep the sound soft, a whisper rather than a rasp.
- Let the inhale and exhale be about the same length.

If the throat feels tight or dry, relax the effort. This is a quiet technique, not a forceful one. Try it for two to three minutes.

8. Practice 5: humming bee breath

Humming bee breath (bhramari) uses a gentle hum on the exhale. Many people find the sound soothing to listen to.

- Sit tall and breathe in slowly through the nose.
- Keeping the lips lightly closed and the teeth slightly apart, breathe out with a soft, steady hum.
- Let the sound be even and comfortable. Feel the gentle vibration in the face and head.

- Rest for a few natural breaths and repeat four to five times.

Keep the hum quiet. You do not need to close the ears or press on the face. Stop if the sound or vibration is uncomfortable.

9. Stronger techniques: what to know

You will come across forceful breaths such as kapalabhati (rapid exhalations) and bhastrika (bellows breath), and practices that involve holding the breath (kumbhaka). They are often taught in classes and videos.

These are not beginner practices. They can cause dizziness, and they are not suitable for people with certain heart, blood pressure, eye, lung or pregnancy-related conditions. If you want to learn them, do so with a qualified teacher who can watch you and adjust the practice, after speaking with your doctor.

A note on claims

You may read that certain breathing techniques cure illness. Breathing practices are not a treatment or cure for any medical condition. Use them as a calming habit alongside, never instead of, medical care.

10. A 10-minute daily routine

Time	Practice	Notes
1 min	Settle and sit	Posture check. Three slow breaths.
2 min	Natural breath awareness	Watch, do not change.
2 min	Three-part breath	Smooth and unforced.
3 min	Alternate nostril breathing	About 5 rounds. No holding.
1 min	Soft ocean or humming bee	Choose one.
1 min	Quiet sitting	Breathe normally. Notice how you feel.

On a busy day, do only natural breath awareness and one other practice. A five-minute practice that happens beats a perfect one that does not.

11. Your four-week plan

Build slowly. Moving up too fast is the most common reason beginners feel uncomfortable or lose interest.

Week	Focus	Daily length	What to notice
1	Natural breath, three-part breath	5 min	Can you keep the breath smooth and unforced?
2	Add alternate nostril breathing	7 min	Do both sides feel similar? Keep it light.
3	Add ocean or humming breath	10 min	Does the sound help you stay focused?
4	Full 10-minute routine	10 min	How do you feel afterwards? Note it in the log.

After week four, repeat the routine for a few more weeks before adding anything. If you would like to go deeper, find a qualified teacher.

12. Common mistakes and fixes

Mistake	What happens	Fix
Breathing too hard	Dizziness, tension	Make the breath smaller and slower.
Holding the breath	Strain, discomfort	Skip holding completely at this stage.
Practising after a big meal	Heaviness, discomfort	Wait about two hours.
Forcing the sound in ocean breath	Sore throat	Soften the sound to a whisper.
Expecting quick results	Frustration	Treat it as a skill that grows over weeks.

13. Questions people ask

How long should I practise?

Start with five minutes and build to about ten. Regular short practice does more than occasional long practice.

What is the best time of day?

Early morning or the quiet hour before bed suit most people, but the best time is the one you can keep. Avoid practising right after a meal.

Can pranayama help with stress?

Many people find slow breathing helps them feel calmer in the moment. It is a relaxation habit, not a treatment, so if stress or anxiety is affecting your daily life, please talk to a doctor or qualified professional.

Is pranayama safe for everyone?

No. Gentle breathing is suitable for most healthy adults, but people with certain conditions should check with a doctor first. See section 2.

Do I need a teacher?

The gentle practices in this guide are suitable to learn from a book. Forceful techniques and breath holding should be learnt in person.

14. Glossary

Term	Plain meaning
Prana	Breath or life force.
Pranayama	Breath practice.
Dirga	Long or full, as in three-part breath.
Nadi shodhana	Alternate nostril breathing.
Ujjayi	Soft ocean breath.
Bhramari	Humming bee breath.
Kumbhaka	Breath holding. Not covered in this guide.

Reminder

This guide is general education and not medical advice. It does not diagnose, treat or cure any condition. If you have a health concern, speak with your doctor before starting a new practice.

Practice log

Print this page and keep a short record. Notes help you see patterns over time.

Day	Minutes	Practices done	How it felt	Notes
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				