

What is Prana?

Prana is “life force” or “breath energy”. It is the energy that flows through your body. But it is also more than this. It is the energy of the universe.

Although we often talk of prana in terms of breath, it is better thought of as energy or life force. When we breathe in, we are bringing prana into our body. When we eat, we are supplying our body with prana.

The quality of our prana is very important. Prana in food is the life force in that food. Fresh fruit, nuts and vegetables are “living” things that are full of prana. Meat and processed foods are “dead”, their prana is of low quality. Thus, yoga encourages us to eat lots of fruit, nuts and vegetables and to minimize meat and processed foods. The better the quality of prana in the food we eat, the better the prana in our body and the better our health. Conversely, the more we eat “dead” food, the more “waste” we need to eliminate from our body to be healthy.

Yoga also encourages us to breathe fully. We are encouraged to breathe slowly and deeply, to fully utilize our lungs. This aims to get the best out of the prana we receive through our breath.

Along with the prana we absorb through our breath and our food, there is also the prana we share through our cosmic connections. Have you ever been in a room and felt other people’s energy levels bring you up or make you feel low? This is the sharing of prana. When we practice yoga with other people, we are sharing our prana with them.

Pranayama

Pranayama means control of the breath or life-force. It is one of the “eight limbs” of yoga. Whether you are aware of it or not, pranayama is a key part of every yoga class. Here we provide short summaries of some common pranayama techniques.

Pranayama we use in our regular yoga practice

Diaphragmatic breath – Abdominal breathing. Balloon the tummy on each inhale and completely empty the breath on each exhale. This is a grounding and settling practice and is regularly used at the start of a yoga class.

Dirga Pranayama – Full yogic breath. Fill the tummy, then side ribs, then chest in one smooth flow on each inhale, then completely empty the breath on each exhale. This is a nourishing, calming and balancing breath. There is a natural progression from diaphragmatic breathing to the Dirga Pranayama and classes will often begin with several rounds of diaphragmatic breathing followed by rounds of Dirga Pranayama.

Ujjayi – Victorious breath. Slightly constrict the throat on each inhale and exhale, creating a soft “sound of the ocean”/snoring/“Darth Vader” sound as you breath. This is a balancing and calming breath. This breath is particularly good for activating the parasympathetic nervous system. Ujjayi is typically used by experienced yogis throughout the yoga class and can be used in combination with other forms of pranayama.



CENTENARY YOGA

Wellbeing for your whole being

671 Seventeen Mile Rocks Road, Sinnamon Park

Cooling and calming pranayama

Nadi shodana – Alternate nostril. Take your first two fingers to your “third eye” and use your thumb and ring finger to alternately close either nostril. Start by closing the right nostril and inhale through the left nostril. Close the left nostril and exhale through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril. Close the right nostril and exhale through the left nostril. This is a calming and balancing breath.

Bhramari – Humming bee breath. Close your eyes and use your fingers to close your ears. Make a humming sound with each exhale. This is a calming breath. The noise helps calm a noisy mind.

Sitali – Curl your tongue and inhale through your tongue. Exhale through your nose. This is a cooling and soothing breath.

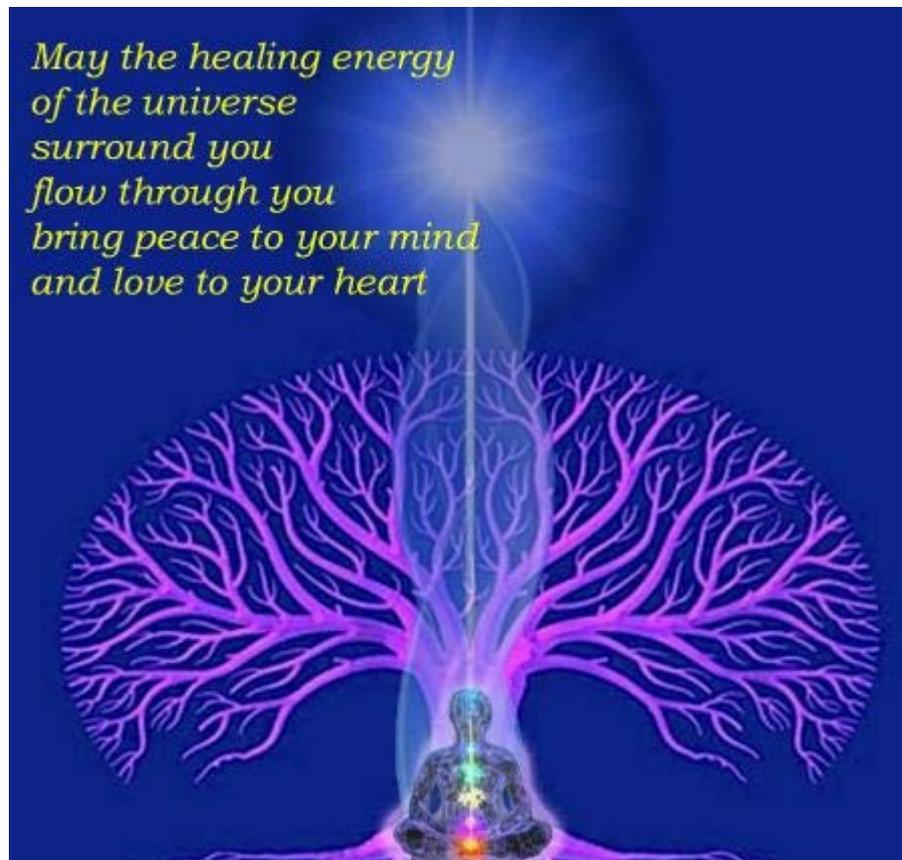
Sitkari – Gently clench your teeth and inhale through your teeth. Exhale through your nose. This is a cooling and soothing breath. It is a useful alternative to Sitali for those people who can’t curl their tongue.

Heating and energising pranayama

The following breaths should be practiced under guidance from an experienced yoga teacher.

Kapalabhati – Shining skull breath. Use quick, short “pumps” of the stomach for each exhale. This is a heating and energising breath. This technique can be used if you want to pick up your energy levels.

Bhastrika – Bellows breath. Slower and more forceful than Kapalabhati. The stomach “pumps” the air on both inhale and exhale. This is a heating and energising breath. It is sometimes used as a prelude to more advanced forms of pranayama such as breath retention, Bhandha locks and stomach churning exercises.



CENTENARY YOGA

Wellbeing for your whole being

671 Seventeen Mile Rocks Road, Sinnamon Park