

The Four Purifications

Nadishodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing)

Gently exhale all air. Close the right nostril with the thumb of the right hand, and inhale slowly and deeply through the left nostril. Close the left nostril with the ring finger, releasing the thumb, and exhale through the right. Inhale through the right, then close it with the thumb and exhale through the left. This makes one round. Start with three rounds and gradually increase to forty.

Kapala Bhati (Skull shining)

Kapala bhati is a series of forced exhalations: exhale and inhale quickly and lightly through both nostrils, feeling the energy striking the point behind the eyebrow center. Emphasize the exhale, letting the inhalation come as a natural reflex. Begin by doing a complete inhale and exhale, then do a partial inhale and begin. Start with 3 rounds of ten exhalations, then gradually increase to ten rounds of sixty.

This method purifies the head area which calms the thoughts. In this way the rapid breathing of Kapala bhati induces a calm mind and calm breath. Persons with high blood pressure or lung disease should not practice kapala bhati.

Agnisara Dhauti (Fire wash)

This is done on a held exhale. Inhale, then exhale all the air. While holding the breath out, lean forward with hand on the knees, pulling the abdomen up and toward the backbone; release it suddenly. Repeat this in-and-out movement rapidly as long as the breath can be held without strain. (Start with ten.) Then inhale gently, exhale completely, and start again. Start with three rounds of ten, then gradually increase to ten rounds of sixty pulls. This method strengthens uddiyana bandha and creates heat at the navel center (manipura chakra) which purifies the nadis (subtle channels through which vital energy, or prana, flows) and stimulates the digestive system.

Ashvini Mudra (Horse Seal)

Inhale completely and hold the breath. Bend the head forward and press the chin tightly into the hollow of the neck, keeping the spine straight. This is jalandhara bandha or throat lock. Contract and release the anal sphincter muscle rapidly and repeatedly ten times. Hold the breath only so long as the following exhalation can be slow and controlled. Begin with three rounds of ten contractions and increase gradually to ten rounds of sixty each. Ashvini mudra strengthens mula bandha (anal lock) and pushes prana (vital energy) upward.