



KAPALABHATI PRANAYAMA

“Skull Shining Breath”

Coming from the roots of *kapala* (“forehead”) and *bhati* (“shining”), this breathing exercise is geared towards bringing luminosity to the seat of the supreme intelligence and awareness (the head). It is an active practice, while also being centering, and is thereby good for all doshas and body types.

BENEFITS

- Tones the digestive organs, improving the agni (digestive fire) and appetite
- Brings alertness, lightness, and consciousness, and eliminates mental distractions and sleepiness
- Cleanses the lungs
- Sharpens sensory perception
- Clears bodily channels
- Supports immunity
- Massages the heart, supporting the cardiovascular system
- Improves circulation from the central core to all parts of the body, particularly the head
- Massages and supports the health of deep pelvic and reproductive organs

THE TECHNIQUE

1. Kapalabhati should be practiced on an empty stomach, so allow at least three to four hours after a meal before engaging this pranayama.
2. Choose a comfortable sitting position. If you are able, it is best to sit cross-legged on the floor with a cushion or blanket to comfortably elevate the hips. Alternatively, you may choose to sit toward the front of a chair, with your feet flat on the floor. Allow the spine to lengthen so that the back, neck, and head are erect.
3. Before beginning, to get a sense of the muscular actions during the breathing exercise, cough a few times. Notice the active exhalation with contraction of the abdominal muscles and the passive inhalation as the abdominal muscles relax.
4. Take a few deep, cleansing breaths.
5. As you complete an inhalation, expel the breath forcefully through the nostrils (without strain or tension) and simultaneously pull the navel actively inward toward the spine, gently contracting the abdominal muscles (much like when you coughed).
6. As you release the abdomen, let the inhalation occur passively, as the lungs will fill without effort.
7. Repeat this process in rapid succession, completing approximately one exhalation per second.

8. Start with two rounds of twenty repetitions. You may slowly work your way up to two rounds of five hundred repetitions (increase by ten or so a week).
9. On the final exhalation, completely empty your lungs, and allow your breath to return to normal.

PRACTICE NOTES

- For vata imbalances, keep a slow, steady pace for a shorter duration.
- For kapha imbalances, increase the pace for a longer duration.
- For pitta imbalances, practice at a normal rate and rhythm.
- If you find yourself becoming lightheaded, slow the pace and duration. Make sure that you are exhaling using your abdominal muscles and not your chest or neck muscles.
- Avoid this practice when pregnant or menstruating, with high blood pressure, migraines, glaucoma, detached retina, hernia, epilepsy, vertigo, or history of stroke. Also avoid if you have undergone recent abdominal surgery. Always contact a practitioner if you have any medical conditions or have any questions or concerns.



The information on this handout is for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. For more information pertaining to your personal needs, please see a qualified health practitioner.