

Kapalabhati Pranayama

Cleansing Breath

Definition: *Kapalabhati* is the “skull shining” breath - a dynamic and energizing purification breath that helps clear and move out stagnant energy and is life promoting. *Kapala* means “head”, *bhati* means “shining”.

Tones the digestive organs, thereby improving *agni* (digestive fire) and appetite. Keeps forehead cool. Brings alertness, lightness and consciousness to the body. Removes sensory distractions from the mind. Cleanses the blood. Clears the pranic channels without creating heat. Not incredibly drying and heating (like *Bhastrika*). Supports immunity (any time the abdomen is engaged, the immune system is supported). Energizes the body and brain. Massages the heart, therefore has a cardiovascular benefit. Is equivalent to running without the impact stress on the joints.

Instructions: *This practice is best done on an empty stomach.*

You will feel like you are throwing/pushing air out from the belly similar to the action of coughing.

- 1 Begin from a comfortable seated position to align spine over the pelvis.
- 2 During this practice, the focus is on the exhalation; the inhalation happens naturally, without effort.
- 3 Expel and push the breath out through the nose by forcefully contracting the abdominal muscles in and up – pushing the diaphragm into the lungs to expel the air out.
- 4 Allow the inhalation to fill the lungs naturally, without effort. The inhalation is spontaneous and involves no effort while the exhalation is strong and active.
- 5 After your round is complete. Sit comfortably and breathe normally.

Advanced Option:

1. At the end of exhalation of the LAST repetition you can add breath retention (*Kevala Kumbhaka*).
2. Exhale all of the air out and then activate all three bandhas (mulabandha, uddiyanabandha and jalandarabandha). Hold this as long as you comfortably can, relax the bandhas and breathe in.
3. Note that if your impulse is to exhale upon relaxation you did not fully exhale before the external breath retention.

Progression: Start with two rounds. Slowly increase 10 repetitions per week.

Start at 50/50 and can work up to 500/500. This will take quite a few months to accomplish.

Indications: Low immunity, inability to focus, poor digestion, poor circulation, thyroid conditions, cardiovascular conditions which involve high cholesterol, diabetes (helps pancreas release insulin), stimulates the liver and gallbladder.

Caution & Contraindication: Use caution for the following conditions Detached retina, glaucoma, very high or very low blood pressure, heart problems, nose bleeds, hernia, ulcers, recent history of epilepsy, recent abdominal surgery. No pranayama during pregnancy and menses.

Signs and Symptoms of Improper Kapalabhati: Headaches, overactive upward moving circulation (*udana vayu*), sensations of being overheated.