

SD Facilitator Breathwork Training

# Module 4

Module 4 Section A

# Pranayama: Theory, Evolution, and Practices

## THE JOURNEY OF PRANAYAMA TO MODERN BREATHWORK

Breath is the foundation of life, a bridge between our inner and outer worlds, connecting the physical, mental, and spiritual realms. For millennia, the practice of pranayama—the ancient art of controlling the breath—has been central to many spiritual traditions, particularly within the wisdom of yoga. Pranayama, which translates to the "extension of life force," has guided countless individuals on a journey toward self-awareness, balance, and transformation.

In recent decades, this ancient discipline has experienced a kind of awakening in the West through modern breathwork practices. By integrating timeless wisdom with contemporary approaches, breathwork has become a powerful tool for personal growth, emotional healing, and physical health and well-being. From its roots in the Vedic texts to its evolution into diverse techniques practiced around the globe today, the breath has been a constant companion on humanity's path to self-understanding and spiritual awakening.

**Prana** is a Sanskrit word that translates to "life force" or "vital energy." In the context of yoga and traditional Indian medicine (Ayurveda), prana is considered the essential energy that sustains all living beings. It flows through the body, nourishing every cell, organ, and system, and is integral to physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Imagine prana as the invisible current that connects us to the universe and to one another. It is not just a concept; it manifests in various forms, including breath, movement, and even the food we consume. Breathing mastery, or "pranayama," is a key practice in yoga that helps to harness and regulate prana (and oxygen, which is a subtle form of prana), allowing us to enhance our vitality and well-being.

Prana is often depicted as moving through pathways known as nadis (energy channels) and is concentrated in specific centers called chakras (wheels of light and energy). Each chakra corresponds to different aspects of our being, from basic survival instincts to higher states of consciousness.

Understanding and cultivating prana can lead to greater energy, improved health, and a deeper sense of connection to the world around us. By practicing mindfulness, breath control, and meditation, we can tap into this life force, fostering harmony within ourselves and with the universe.

In this module we'll journey through some of the most essential and "must know" of pranayama techniques for breathwork facilitators and breathing therapists. The following techniques will equip breathwork facilitators with timeless, effective practices for assisting themselves and others on the journey to vibrant wellbeing, healing, and spiritual awakening.

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# **Pranayama**

## **ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUES**



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### 1. Diaphragmatic (Abdominal) Breathing

#### Instructions:

**Step 1:** Lie on your back or sit in a comfortable position with your shoulders relaxed.

Place Your Hands on your lower ribs at the level of your diaphragm.

#### Step 2: Inhale Slowly Through Your Nose:

Breathe in deeply, focusing on expanding your abdomen and feeling your lower ribs move outward as your diaphragm expands and opens the lower lobes of the lungs, causing the diaphragm to move downward as it expands.

#### Step 3. Slowly Through Your Nose or Mouth:

Exhale slowly, allowing your abdomen and lower ribs to fall and diaphragm to relax.

Repeat Continue this pattern, maintaining a slow, steady

rhythm, and focus on the movement of your lower ribs. Aim for 5-10 minutes of practice a few times a day.

**Benefits:** Reduces stress, improves lung function, functional movement, stabilization of the spine, and promotes relaxation and Vagal Nerve Tone. Good for all body types and constitutions.

### 2. Three Part Yogic Breath: Dirga Pranayama

The three part yogi breath is foundational to the Soul Dimension Breathing technique. It helps breathers to explore and access full, wave-like, rhythmical breathing.

#### Instructions:

**Step 1:** Sit comfortably or lie down in a relaxed position, ensuring your spine is straight.

Place one hand on your belly and the other on your chest.

Begin by inhaling deeply through your nose, allowing your belly to rise and expand outward.

As you exhale, feel your belly contract and draw back towards your spine.

Focus on breathing slowly and deeply into your abdomen, filling the lowest part of your lungs.

#### Step 2: Ribcage Breath (Thoracic Breathing)

After a few breaths in the belly, begin to draw your breath into your ribcage.

Inhale deeply through your nose, first expanding your belly and then feeling the sides of your ribs expand outward.

As you exhale, let the ribs contract and draw inward while the belly softens.

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### Step 3: Chest Breath (Clavicular Breathing)

Now, add the final part of the breath. Inhale deeply, expanding your belly first, then your ribs, and finally drawing the breath into your upper chest.

Feel the chest rise as your collarbones lift slightly.

On the exhale, release the air from your chest, then your ribcage, and finally your belly.

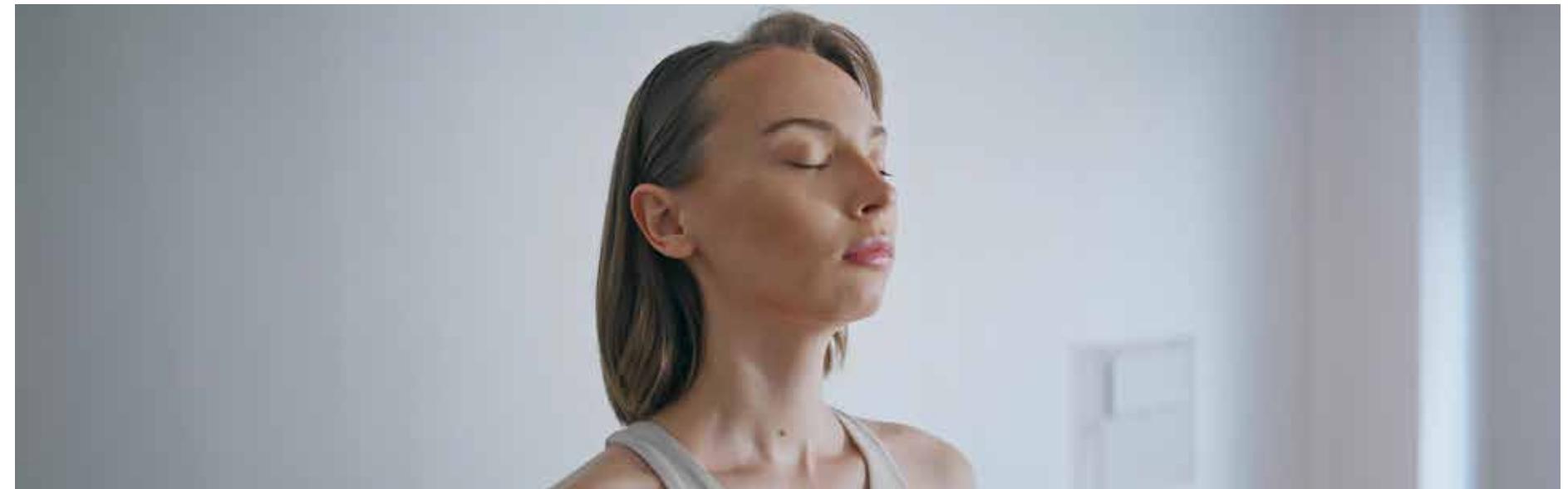
Keep the breath slow, smooth, and controlled, engaging all three areas with each breath.

**Step 4: Complete Cycle**  
Practice this full, three-part breath continuously, inhaling through your belly, ribs, and chest, then exhaling in the reverse order.

Aim for 5-10 minutes of focused breathing, letting the breath flow naturally and rhythmically.

#### Benefits:

**Calms the mind** by activating the parasympathetic nervous system.



**Improves Lung Capacity:** Fully engaging the diaphragm and lungs helps enhance oxygen intake and respiratory function.

**Releases Stored Tension:** By focusing on breath expansion in the belly, ribs, and chest, it allows for the release of tightness and tension in these areas.

**Increases Focus and Awareness:** Connecting the breath with the body fosters mindfulness, grounding you in the present moment.

**Promotes Emotional Balance:** Deep, conscious breathing can help regulate emotions, fostering a sense of inner balance and stability.

**Boosts Energy Levels:** Increasing oxygenation in the body revitalizes the cells, promoting energy and vitality.

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### 3. Box Breathing

**Instructions:** Inhale, hold, exhale, and pause, each for the same count of 4 seconds or more.

**History:** Used by ancient warriors, shamans, yogis, and later adopted by modern military personnel to manage stress and improve focus.

**Benefits:** Calming the mind, enhancing concentration, improving HRV, and regulating the nervous system.

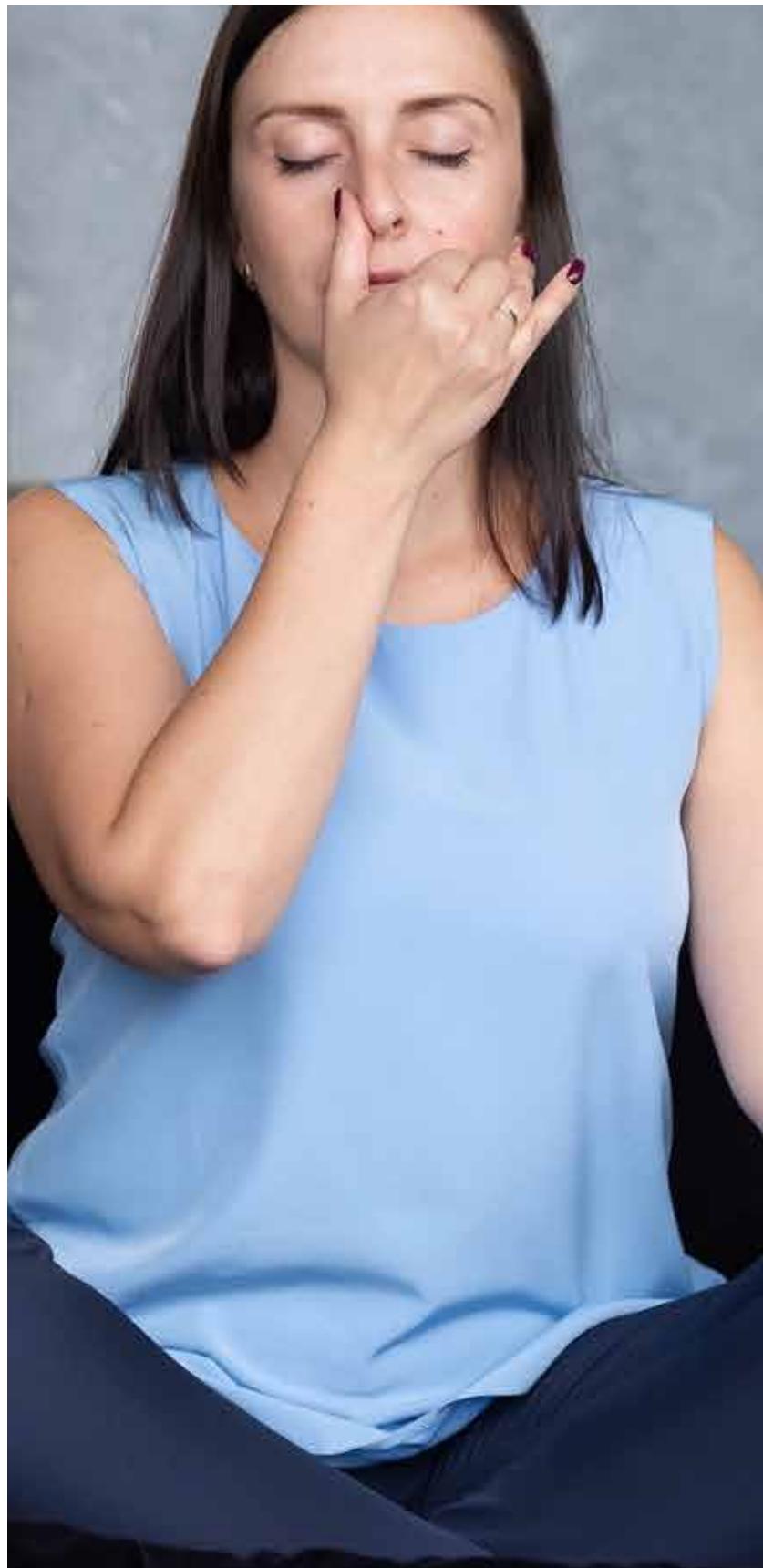
### 4. Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana)

#### Instructions:

Start by blocking the right nostril with the thumb of the right hand. Exhale through the left nostril.

Then Inhale through the left nostril and block the left nostril with the ring finger of the right hand.

Exhale and inhale through the right nostril. Repeat for 10 or more cycles.



**History:** Originated in ancient India as a key part of Pranayama practices in Yoga. Mentioned in classical texts like the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, where it was used to balance the body's energies.

**Benefits:** Balancing the nervous system, harmonizing the left and right hemispheres of the brain, and improving mental clarity.

### 5. 4-7-8 Breathing

**Instructions:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7, and exhale for 8 seconds.

**Practice context:** This ancient yogic technique was popularized by Dr. Andrew Weil with modern medical insights about certain forms of breathing that increase HRV and cardiovascular health.

**Benefits:** Promotes relaxation, HRV (heart rate variability), reduces anxiety, and restful sleep.

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### 6. Kapalabhati (Skull Shining Breath)

**Instructions:** Kapalabhati involves short, forceful exhalations followed by passive inhalations. The exhalations are rapid and controlled, and the inhalations occur automatically; there is no active effort in inhaling.

**Breath Cycle:** Typically performed in cycles, Kapalabhati may consist of a specific number of rapid breaths followed by a long, deep inhalation and retention.

**Focus:** The focus is on the abdominal muscles. You actively engage the diaphragm and abdominal muscles to expel the air forcefully, which helps to cleanse and energize the respiratory system.

**Practice context:** Used historically as a cleansing practice to purify the mind and body.

**Benefits:** Energizes the body, clears the sinuses, detoxify the lungs, cleanses the stomach and sinuses (kapha dosha), tones the diaphragm and abdominal muscles, moves stagnant energy, and improves lung capacity.

### 7. Breath of Fire (Bhastrika)

Breath of Fire is a term commonly used in Kundalini yoga. It emphasizes a dynamic breathing pattern that invigorates and energizes the practitioner.

**Instructions:** Inhalation and Exhalation: Breath of Fire involves continuous, rhythmic, and equal inhalations and exhalations through the nose, generating a rapid pumping action in the abdomen without pausing between breaths.

**Breath Cycle:** There is generally no specific count; the focus is on creating a steady rhythm, often maintained for an extended period.

**Focus:** The technique also centers on abdominal contraction, but the inhale and exhale are both active and forceful, creating a more vigorous approach than Kapalabhati.

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**Practice context:** Commonly employed in Kundalini yoga classes, it is often used throughout a session to maintain energy levels and focus while meditating or performing asanas.

**Benefits:** Breath of Fire is known for increasing energy, enhancing lung capacity, improving oxygenation, and promoting detoxification. It can also serve to increase clarity of mind and spiritual awareness.

### 8. Ujjayi Pranayama (Ocean Breath/Victorious Breath)

**How to Practice:** breathe smoothly and rhythmically in and out while gently constricting the muscles at the back of your throat (the glottis).

This is similar to the sensation you would create if you were fogging up a mirror with your breath. The breath should produce a soft, whispering sound, often compared to the sound of ocean waves.

**Tip:** breath to a rhythm of in for 6, hold 3, exhale 12 seconds to master control of the breath

**History:** Ujjayi Pranayama has its origins in ancient yogic traditions, dating back thousands of years. It is mentioned in classical yogic texts like the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, where it is described as a key technique for controlling the breath, calming the mind, and preparing the practitioner for deeper states of meditation. A traditional Pranayama technique with roots in ancient Yoga, described in texts like the Gheranda Samhita.

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### **Benefits:**

*Enhances Focus and Concentration:* The rhythmic sound of the breath aids in maintaining focus during meditation and yoga practice.

*Improves Respiratory Function:* This technique strengthens the lungs, improves oxygen intake, and enhances respiratory efficiency.

*Activates the parasympathetic nervous system:* Reduces stress and promotes relaxation.

*Balances Energy:* Ujjayi breathing helps balance the flow of prana (life force energy) throughout the body, promoting overall well-being.

*Supports Mindful Movement:* By synchronizing breath with movement in yoga, Ujjayi Pranayama helps create a smooth and meditative flow in asana practice.



*Reduces Anxiety:* The deep, controlled breathing can help manage and reduce feelings of anxiety and tension.

*Regulates Blood Pressure:* Regular practice can help lower high blood pressure and improve cardiovascular health.

*Promotes Mental and Emotional Stability:* Ujjayi breathing helps regulate emotions, leading to a more stable and peaceful state of mind.

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### 9. Sheetali (Cooling Breath)

**How to Practice:** Curl the tongue into a tube, inhale deeply through the tongue, and exhale through the nose.

**Benefits:** Cools the body, reduces stress, alleviates indigestion, and is helpful in calming excess heat (both physically and emotionally).

### 10. Surya Bhedana (Right Nostril Breathing)

**Instructions:** Inhale through the right nostril and exhale through the left, keeping the left nostril closed during the inhale.

**Benefits:** Activates the body, boosts energy levels, and stimulates the sympathetic nervous system.

### 11. Chandra Bhedana (Left Nos-tril Breathing)

**Instructions:** Inhale through the left nostril and exhale through the right, keeping the right nostril closed during the inhale.

**Benefits:** Activates the parasympathetic nervous system, lowers blood pressure, reduces stress, and cools the body.

### 12. Bhramari (Bee Breath)

**How to Practice:** Inhale deeply and, on the exhale, make a humming sound like a bee, with the mouth closed.

**Benefits:** Relieves tension, calms the nervous system, reduces anger and frustration, and is helpful for insomnia.



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**13. Bhramari Pranayama Mudra,** also known as the "Bee Mudra," is a hand gesture used alongside the Bhramari Pranayama (Bee Breath) practice to enhance the calming and grounding effects of this breathwork. It involves using the fingers to gently close off certain sensory organs, creating a deeper sense of inward focus and peace.

### Instructions:

Sit in a comfortable, upright position with your spine straight. You can sit cross-legged on the floor or in a chair with your feet flat on the ground. Can also do in a lying down position.

**Hand Positioning:** Place both thumbs gently over the cartilage of your ears (not inside the ears, but on the outer part), softly pressing to close off external sounds.

Lightly rest the index fingers above your eyebrows, near the

area of the forehead (optional: rest at the temples for more grounding).

Gently place your middle fingers on your closed eyelids.

Position the ring fingers at the base of your nostrils.

Rest your little fingers gently on your chin or around your mouth.

### Breath and Sound:

Inhale deeply through the nose. On the exhale, close your mouth and make a humming sound, like the buzzing of a bee, while gently applying pressure with your thumbs and fingers to block out external distractions.

**Awareness:** As you hum, focus your awareness inward. Feel the vibration of the sound in your head, throat and chest. Let the vibration calm your mind and bring a sense of inner tranquility.

**Repeat:** Continue for 5 to 10 breaths, or for as long as it feels comfortable, gradually deepening your experience.

### Benefits:

**Deepens Pranayama Practice:** The combination of mudra and breath enhances the calming and soothing effects of Bhramari Pranayama.

**Reduces Anxiety and Stress:** The mudra helps create an inward focus, blocking sensory distractions, which can significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and mental agitation.

**Improves Concentration:** By closing off external stimuli, it sharpens focus and promotes mental clarity.

**Balances the Nervous System:** The practice stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, encouraging relaxation and emotional balance.

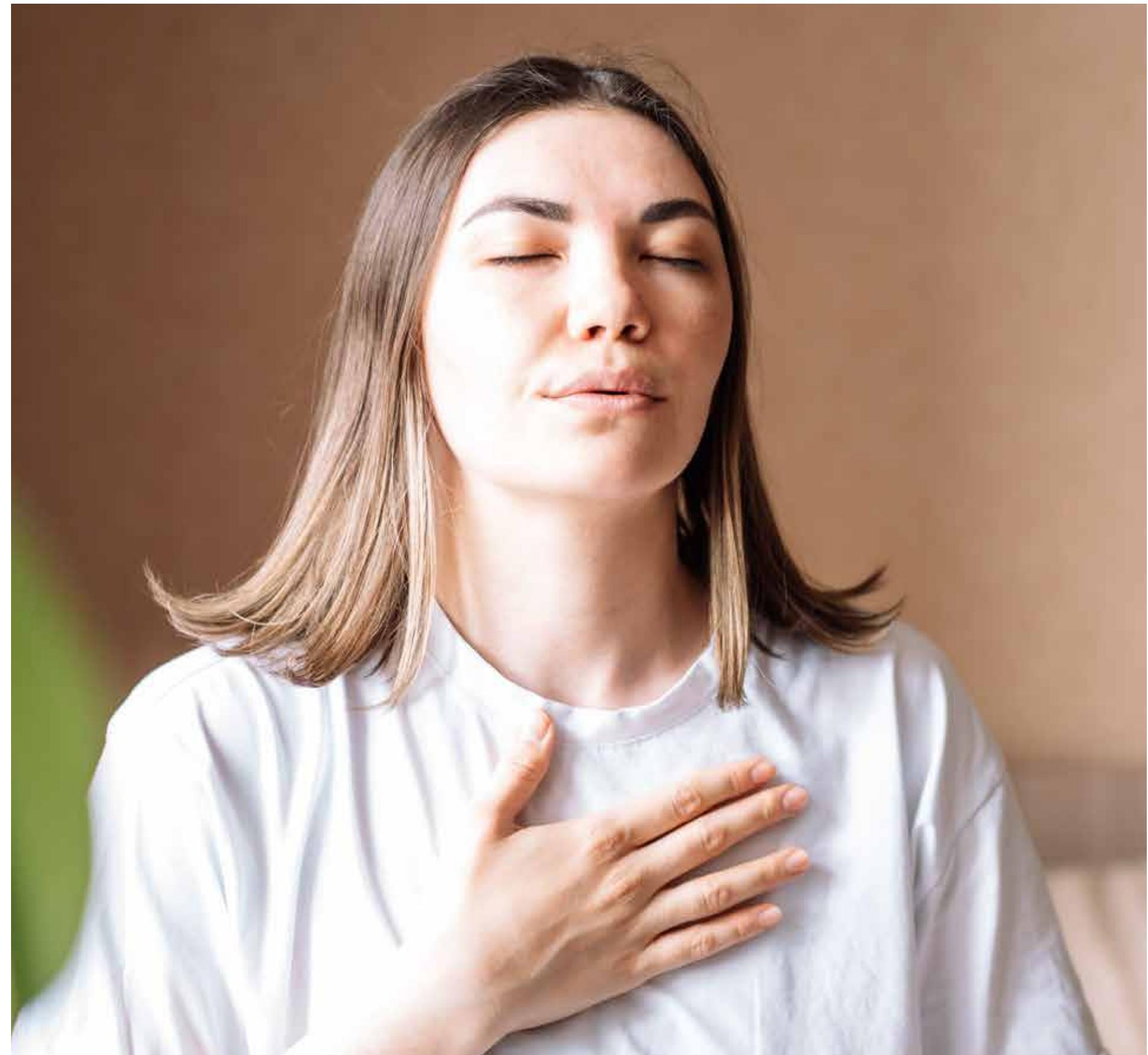
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**Enhances Vagal Tone and Releases Tension:** The humming vibration paired with the mudra helps release tension, promote relaxation and groundedness.

### 14. Simhasana (Lion's Breath)

**How to Practice:** Inhale deeply through the nose, then exhale forcefully through the mouth with the tongue extended and a roaring sound.

**Benefits:** Releases tension, especially in the face and throat, stimulates the throat chakra, and can help with self-expression.



## Module 4 Section B

# **Breathholds (Kumbhaka)**

## **IN YOGA, BREATH HOLDS ARE REFERRED TO**

as Kumbhaka, which means "retention" or "suspension" of breath. Kumbhaka is a key component of yogic pranayama breathing exercises that is used to control and direct prana (life force) within the body. By temporarily suspending the breath, Kumbhaka helps still the mind, increase lung capacity, and intensify the energetic benefits of breathwork. Breath holds also help reduce sensitivity to the build up of CO<sub>2</sub>, thereby enhancing optimal absorption of O<sub>2</sub>.

Breath holds in yoga are not just about physical breath retention; they are tools for gaining control over the mind and prana, leading to a deeper connection between body, breath, and higher states of consciousness.

# Types of Kumbhaka (Breath Holds)

There are two primary types of Kumbhaka, with variations used in different pranayama practices.

## 1. Antara Kumbhaka (Internal Breath Retention)

**Instructions:** After a full inhale, the breath is held with the lungs full. This creates a feeling of expansion and stillness, increasing the capacity to hold prana within the body.

**Benefits:** Enhances lung capacity, calms the mind, and boosts concentration. It also helps raise prana (life force) and direct it through the nadis (energy channels) and into higher energy centers (particularly the 5th and 6th chakras).

## 2. Bahya Kumbhaka (External Breath Retention)

**Instructions:** After a full exhale, the breath is held with the lungs empty. This breath hold creates a vacuum in the body, stimulating internal heat and circulation of energy and increase of CO<sub>2</sub>.

**Benefits:** Cleanses and detoxifies, promotes mental clarity, and helps cultivate inner control. It is often practiced in conjunction with bandhas (energy locks) for maximum energetic effect.

## 3. Sahaja Kumbhaka (Spontaneous Breath Retention)

**Instructions:** This is a natural, effortless cessation of breath that may happen spontaneously during deep meditation or advanced pranayama. It is not forced and occurs when the mind is deeply still.

Considered a **more advanced practice**, occurring more naturally in deeper stages of meditation, samadhi (bliss states of union), and breath mastery.

**Benefits:** Promotes deep inner peace and spiritual insight, allowing for profound states of meditation.

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### 4. Kevala Kumbhaka (Advanced Breath Suspension)

**Instructions:** In advanced yogic practices, Kevala Kumbhaka refers to the ability to suspend the breath naturally without conscious effort. This occurs as a result of intense practice and deep inner mastery.

Kevala Kumbhaka occurs more naturally in deeper stages of meditation, samadhi (bliss states), and breath mastery.

**Benefits:** Represents a heightened state of consciousness, where breath becomes subtle or ceases altogether, leading to experiences of transcendence and unity.



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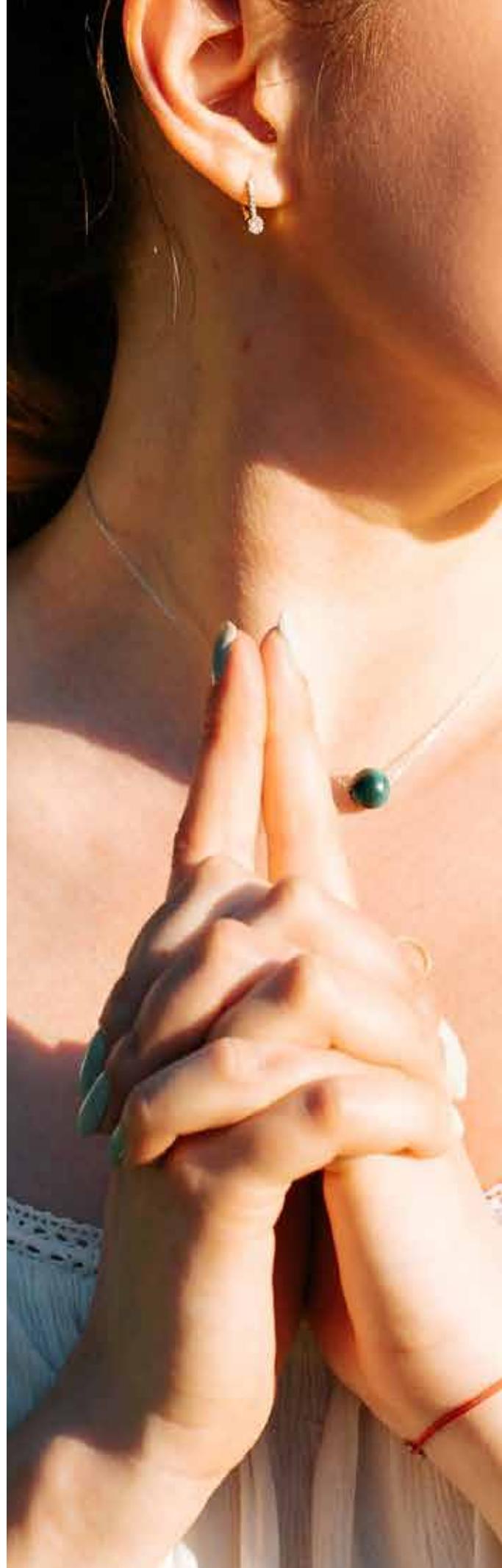
## Module 4 Section C

# Mudras and Bandhas

## YOGA MUDRAS AND BANDHAS

are powerful tools for unlocking the deeper potential of your yoga, pranayama, and breathwork practice. While yoga postures (asanas) engage the physical body, mudras and bandhas work on a more subtle level, influencing energy flow, mental focus, and overall vitality.

Understanding the essentials of mudras and bandhas can enhance your awareness and connection to the energetic dimension of your wellbeing and assist the awakening of prana and kundalini shakti (superconscious spiritual awakening energy). Through consistent practice, they offer a pathway toward greater health, stamina, healing, energy balancing and energy awakening.



# Mudras and Bandhas

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**Mudras** - Symbolic hand, body, or facial gestures used in yoga and meditation to direct energy, enhance concentration, inner balance, and stimulate specific areas of the brain and body.

Mudras work by creating an energy circuit, often with the hands, which influences the flow of prana. They are known as "seals" because they "lock" the energy into a particular path.

Below are examples of important and widely practiced mudras that are frequently integrated into a yoga, breathing and/or meditation practice.

## 1. Gyan Mudra

### (Seal of Knowledge)

**Instructions:** Touch the tip of the thumb and index finger together, keeping the other fingers extended.

**Benefits:** Enhances concentration, clarity, and wisdom.

## 2. Prana Mudra (Energy Mudra)

**Instructions:** Touch the thumb to the tips of the ring and little fingers while keeping the index and middle fingers extended.

**Benefits:** Increases vitality, balances energy, and boosts the immune system.

## 3. Anjali Mudra (Prayer Gesture)

**Instructions:** Press the palms together at the heart center.

**Benefits:** Fosters balance, calmness, and gratitude.

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### 4. Shambhavi Mudra (Eyebrow Center Gazing)

**Instructions:** Sit comfortably and focus your eyes at the point between your eyebrows (third eye), keeping the eyes slightly open or gently closed while inwardly gazing at the spot.

**Benefits:** Enhances concentration, promotes inner awareness, and stimulates the ajna **chakra** (third eye), leading to heightened intuition and mental clarity.

### 5. Khechari Mudra (Tongue Lock)

**Instructions:** Roll your tongue back to touch the soft palate of the mouth, gradually extending it further as the practice deepens (eventually towards the nasal cavity in advanced practice).

**Benefits:** Directs energy upward, facilitates higher states of meditation and purification of vishuddha chakra, and promotes the experience of inner bliss, truthfulness, truth, and spiritual awakening.

Both Shambhavi and Khechari Mudra are especially powerful tools to deepen meditation, awaken spiritual energy, and enhance mental focus. These subtle, advanced practices help cultivate stillness and connect the practitioner to higher states of consciousness, making them essential components of more advanced yoga, breathwork, and pranayama journeys.

### 6. Ashwini Mudra

Involves the contraction and relaxation of the anal sphincter, often likened to the movements of a horse (from "ashwini," meaning horse in Sanskrit).

**Instructions:** Sit comfortably in a cross-legged position (like Sukhasana) or on your heels (Vajrasana). Keep your spine straight and shoulders relaxed.

**Inhale:** Take a deep breath in through your nose, filling your lungs.

Contract: As you exhale, gently contract the anal sphincter muscles, pulling them upwards. Hold the contraction for a few seconds.

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**Relax:** Release the contraction while inhaling again.

Repetition: Repeat the contraction and relaxation 10-15 times, focusing on the sensations in your body.

**Benefits:** This mudra stimulates, purifies, and helps balance the first two chakras (Muladhara and Swadhisthana), enhances energy flow, and improves digestive health

**Bandhas** - Energy locks or “seals” in yoga, designed to control and direct the flow of prana (life force) within the body. By engaging specific muscles and creating internal pressure, bandhas help contain, elevate, and channel energy through the nadis (energy channels) to support physical stability, mental clarity, and heightened spiritual awareness. There are three main bandhas:

**1. Mula Bandha (Root Lock):** Activates Muladhara Chakra. Engages the pelvic floor muscles to activate and stabilize the base of the spine.

**Instructions:** Sit comfortably in a cross-legged position or on your heels. Inhale deeply, then as you exhale, gently contract the pelvic floor muscles, drawing them upward and inward. Imagine lifting the perineum. Maintain the contraction for several breaths, then relax as you inhale.

**2. Uddiyana Bandha (Abdominal Lock):** Activates Svadisthana and Manipura Chakras. Involves pulling the lower belly inward and upward to energize the core and lift prana.

Instructions: Stand or sit with a straight spine, or perform this in a forward bend. Inhale deeply and exhale completely, emptying the lungs. Pull your abdomen in and up toward the spine, creating a hollow feeling in the belly. Hold this position for a few breaths, then release as you inhale.

**3. Jalandhara Bandha (Throat Lock):** Activates Vishuddhi Chakra. Involves tucking the chin toward the chest to control prana in the upper body and calm the mind.

**Instructions:** Sit comfortably with a straight spine. Inhale deeply, then as you exhale, lower your chin toward your chest, gently compressing the throat. Maintain this position for a few breaths while holding your breath.

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Release the lock as you inhale, lifting your chin back up.

**4. Maha Bandha (The Great Lock):** When the three above bandhas are practiced together, they create Maha Bandha (The Great Lock), enhancing the flow of energy throughout the entire system.



three-part yogic breathing to the invigorating practices like Kapalabhati and Breath of Fire, each method offers unique benefits for physical vitality, emotional balance, and spiritual awakening. By incorporating breath holds (kumbhakas), mudras, and bandhas, practitioners can deepen their connection with prana (life force), unlock the mind's potential and foster profound healing and inner stability.

Through pranayama and breathwork, we can cultivate inner harmony, resilience, and an enduring sense of connection between body, mind, and spirit, enriching both our personal and collective journeys toward vibrant health and spiritual awakening.