

FOOD & MOOD

COACHING

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING (NADI SHODHANA) - THE 'WHY' AND 'HOW'

WHY?

There are two key components to Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana):

1. Breathing through the nose (not the mouth). Both the inhale and the exhale travel through the nose, keeping mouth relaxed and closed throughout
2. Actively alternating the nostril used in the inhale and exhale by using your fingers to open and close each nostril in a rhythmical fashion

Benefits of nostril breathing

In the handout 'Slow Nostril Breathing', we touched on the benefit of breathing through the nose as opposed to the mouth. The nose provides a more optimal pathway for air to travel into our lungs for increased efficiency and health benefits. This is something that has been observed for thousands of years in traditional cultures. In traditional yogic practices, nostril breathing has been taken one step further in a pranayama (breathing exercise) called Nadi Shodhana; meaning channel purification.

In traditional Indian/yogic philosophy, Nadis are the subtle energy channels that move prana or energy through the body. Similarly in traditional Chinese philosophy, the energy channels are referred to as meridians. The nose is believed to house the end points of two primary Nadis that begin in the pelvis and make their way up to the nostrils; Pingala Nadi, on the right side ending in right nostril and Ida Nadi on the left side, ending in the left nostril.

By intentionally alternating the opening and closing of both nostrils, this practice is believed to balance the energy within the body. The left nostril – Ida Nadi – governs more yin, feminine and calming responses and the right nostril – Pingla Nadi – governs more yang, masculine, energetic responses.

Science has been found to support these ancient claims, showing that breathing through the left nostril stimulates 'right brain' activity (feelings, creativity, rhythm, intuition, imagination) and conversely breathing through the right nostril stimulates 'left brain' activity (methodical thinking, facts, logic, language).

Traditional practices of Nadi Shodhana (starting with the right nostril blocked and the left nostril open) have also been known to increase lung capacity, and reduce blood pressure and heart rate (stimulating the PSNS). Recent studies have even shown that depending on the nostril you begin to breathe with will determine the physiological effects.

If you take your first breath through the left (by blocking the right) this is more likely to simulate the traditional effects. Blocking the left nostril first and inhaling through the right side has been shown to increase heart rate and blood pressure, stimulating the sympathetic nervous system – could this be an alternative to your morning coffee?



FOOD & MOOD

COACHING

HOW?

1. Sit with spine erect, but relaxed (sit on a block, a cushion to assist this posture)
2. Relax your left hand to the left knee or thigh. You may wish to bring the tips of the left forefinger and thumb together to form a chin mudra, or simply relax your palm naturally where it lands
3. Take your right hand towards your face, taking your peace fingers (first and middle fingers) together gently touch them to the third eye (space between your eyebrows). Your right thumb will rest on your right nostril and your right ring finger will rest on your left nostril. Your little finger can just relax in space.
4. For your first few rounds of breath, breathe through both nostrils at a pace that is natural and usual for you (mouth gently closed)
5. Once you have made a full exhale through both nostrils, use your right thumb to block your right nostril and breathe in through the left nostril.
6. Close your left nostril with your ring finger, open your right nostril and fully exhale through the right nostril.
7. Breathe in through the right, block the right, open the left and breath out through the left.
8. Repeat this pattern: In left - out right. In right - out left.

Important notes:

- + Perform this exercise seated with relaxed head, neck and shoulders.
- + Practice for a few breaths through to a few minutes of breaths – 3-5 minutes is a great starting point and building from there.
- + Take note of how you feel before engaging in this practice and afterwards. Simply observe

