

Choice

Health & Wellbeing



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Water, water everywhere

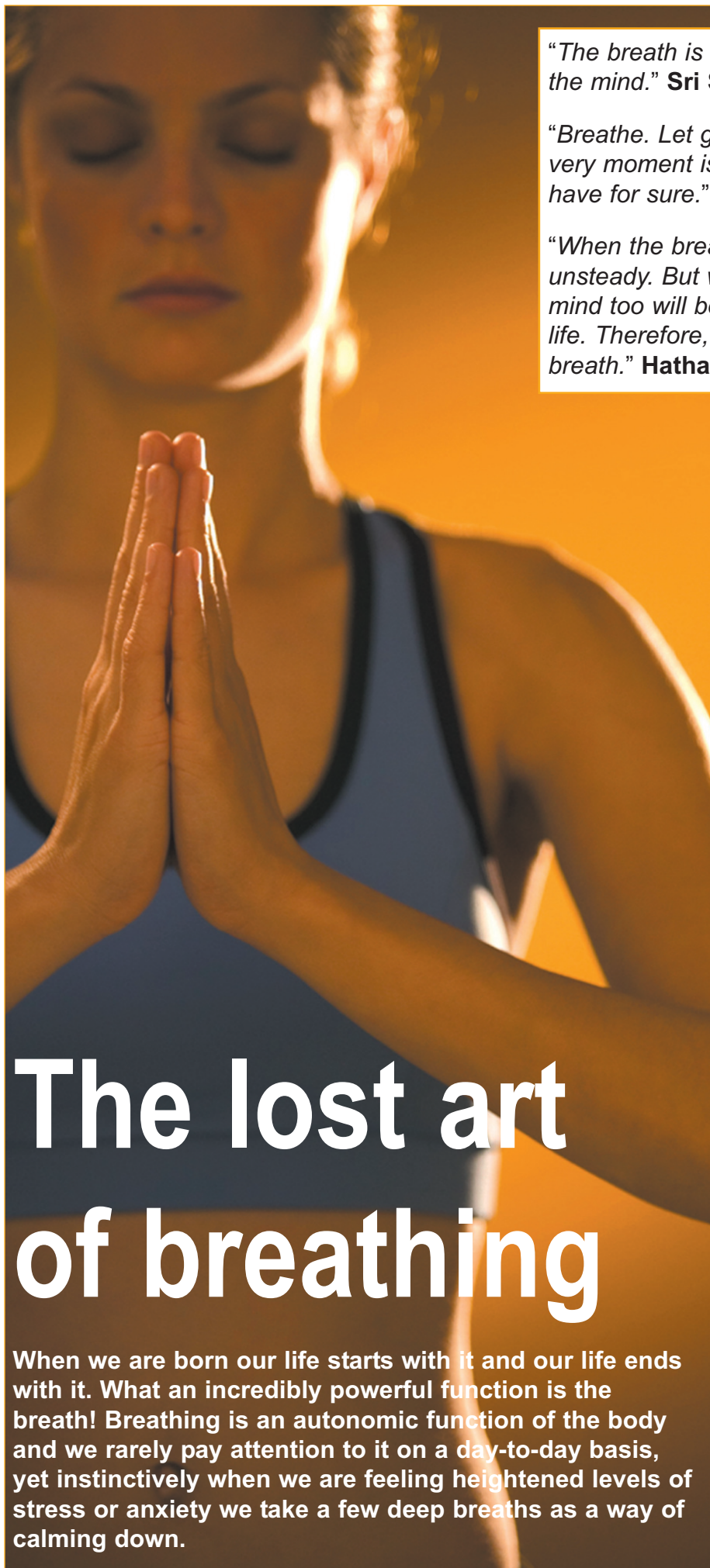
your skin and H₂O

In this issue:



Your Health and Wellbeing Success Starts Here!

Are you a health-conscious consumer, looking to come into the industry or looking for a suitable treatment? Find out what the experts say and read.



"The breath is the link between the body and the mind." **Sri Sri Ravi Shankar**

"Breathe. Let go. And remind yourself that this very moment is the only one you know you have for sure." **Oprah Winfrey**

"When the breath wanders the mind also is unsteady. But when the breath is calmed the mind too will be still, and the yogi achieves long life. Therefore, one should learn to control the breath." **Hatha Yoga Pradipika**

At the survival level, our bodies can exist without food for several weeks and without water for several days, but without breath for even a few minutes, we would not survive. If we want to stay healthy in our mind and body, food choices, physical exercise, rest, intake of sufficient water directly contribute to our wellbeing. So then with the significant impact that breath has on very existence why would we choose not to nurture and attend to that which gives us our life force?

The breath fundamentally contributes to all our neuro-motor, sensory and motor functions. 'Prana' is not only the flow of oxygen to our entire being, it is our vital life force energy that sustains all living organisms, so in order to understand the concepts of consciousness and spirituality we must first truly understand the breath that bridges or brings 'union' of our physical reality with our mind and higher self. Prana is one of three vital essences for life along with tejas, the force that enables transmutation of the body, mind, spirit to interact and digest; and ojas which is the primal substance of vitality and strength.

Prana is the subtle energy that governs all functions of the body and mind, taking responsibility for the co-ordination of breathing, senses and the mind and is considered the subtle form of the 'Vata' dosha.

In today's sedentary and stressful lifestyle, we maintain a relatively shallow and quick breath, using only a fraction of our lung capacity providing just enough energy supply for the body to function. This way of breathing reduces our vitality, our resistance to diseases and starves our brain of essential oxygen creating tiredness, irritability, disturbed sleep cycles and so on.

What is pranayama

Pranayama is the fourth branch of Patanjali's yoga sutra – the path to enlightenment. Pranayama is not only a deep form of breathing exercise, but a discipline of yoga, which prepares individuals self-realization at an astral level and maintains the mind-body equilibrium at a physical level. The practice of pranayama decreases the respiration rate and elongates the breath and is therefore interpreted as elongated life as well. It is therefore a powerful tool to eradicate diseases at the root cause.

At the subtle body level, pranayama can purify the nadi's (channels of the body) and awaken the

The lost art of breathing

When we are born our life starts with it and our life ends with it. What an incredibly powerful function is the breath! Breathing is an autonomic function of the body and we rarely pay attention to it on a day-to-day basis, yet instinctively when we are feeling heightened levels of stress or anxiety we take a few deep breaths as a way of calming down.

Branch of yoga	Description
Asana	Postures. Yoga poses that quiet the mind and preliminary control the senses and the mind. 48 postures described.
Dharana	Concentration. Focusing the mind by use of mantras. Deep concentration of the chakras (centres of energy).
Dhyana	Uninterrupted meditation. Meditation with awareness and ability to let go of ego, mind and intellect into the consciousness.
Niyama	Rules of conduct. Purity (saucha), Contentment (santosh), self-discipline and purification (tapas), self-observation (svadhyaya), devotion to god (ishvara-pranidhana).
Pranayama	Control of breath. To attain, control & channel of subtle energy prana.
Pratyahara	Withdrawal of sensory perceptions. To detach from enjoyment of sensory pleasures. Holding the mind and breath.
Samadhi	Silence or pure consciousness. The true connection to the divine where there is no concentration needed.
Yama	Ethical living and control. Non-violence (ahimsa), truthfulness Satya), control of sexual energy (brahmacharya), freedom from hoarding (asteya), abstinence from greed (aparigraha).

sushumna nadi that prepares the yogi to experience a state of 'bliss' or getting in touch with consciousness. Pranayama also prepares the yogi for deeper meditation.

The effective circulation of prana can maintain and promote good health; pranayama therefore is the art of channelling this pranic energy through voluntary breath control. Controlled breath work is most effective when supported by practice of all eight branches of yoga as well as yogic cleansing practices such as neti and dhauti and support through Ayurvedic daily regimens 'dina charya' designed to protect ojas and maintain tejas.

Pranayama breathing exercises vary from rapid to slow breath, silent or loud, mild or forceful, short or deep, maximum or minimum lung capacity, using left, right nostril or mouth. During all practice, breath should be non-violent, steady, smooth, continuous with complete awareness.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutra

Benefits of pranayama

Much research has been and is being carried out on the powerful health benefits of breath control used in yogic practice and needless to say you only have to sit for a few minutes and try these techniques to benefit from the instant feeling of calmness, peace and wellbeing. With its direct

physical impact on the respiratory system, the deep inhalation and exhalation of breath results in higher levels of oxygen being supplied to the blood. This increased circulation of blood can continue to replenish all the other bodily tissues. At a metaphysical level the vital life force 'prana' is what keeps the body functioning. Much research has demonstrated the positive effects on medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, migraines, obesity, asthma, high blood pressure, as well as many stress-related conditions such as depression, anxiety and insomnia.

Some reasons why the practice of pranayama is so important

- ☞ Increase the capacity of our lungs to energise the body with a fresh supply of oxygen
- ☞ Reduce our breathing rate which can control blood pressure and increase longevity
- ☞ Expels toxic waste from the respiratory system
- ☞ Improves health of the heart and can reduce hypertension
- ☞ Strengthen respiratory and nervous system
- ☞ Helps increase metabolic activity and digestion
- ☞ Reduces stress and calms the mind and nervous activity
- ☞ Increased awareness and concentration
- ☞ Bring more energy and vitality by providing exercise for the internal organs

☞ Reduces negative emotions such as anger, irritability, depression, greed, arrogance, jealousy etc

Pranayama and your dosha

According to Ayurveda, we all have a unique constitution with one or two dominant doshas. So just as we can tailor our diet and lifestyle to suit our constitution, we can select breathing exercises that are also suitable for our dosha type.

The right environment

To enhance the benefits of pranayama practices and to promote clarity and focus of the mind, it is ideal to have an environment that is clutter-free, quiet, clean and with plenty of ventilation so that fresh air is able to enter into the room. Keep some comfort provisions such as cushions and blankets especially if you follow on with meditation. When we practice pranayama, we should sit in a comfortable position, with the spine erect and the focus on our breath.

Take care

Pranayama is integral to holistic lifestyle changes and if you are not used to focused breath work please take care. Gradual and slow progress is recommended to prevent imbalances from occurring especially if diet and lifestyle are not conducive. Incorrect or inappropriate use of pranayama techniques can put undue stress on the lungs, diaphragm and heart.

If you are interested in exploring more about the power of your breath and improve your wellbeing, the 'art of living' foundation run various courses across the UK. Find out more about courses via the website:

<http://uk.artofliving.org/courses.htm> **CHW**

☞ **For one-to-one advice on breath work, Ayurvedic consultations, treatments and corporate workshops, please contact Geeta Vara, a fully qualified Ayurvedic Practitioner based in Central & South East/West London.**

Email: geetavara@gmail.com, call on 07956 521601 or visit www.geetavara.co.uk

Dosha	Pranayama	Benefits
Vata	Ujjaya - Sitting in padmasana or siddhasana. Inhale slow breath through the nose through the back of the throat making a 'dardh vadar' noise. Hold as long as is comfortable and slow release in same manner as inhalation.	Removes the heat from the head. Increases gastric fire. Removes evils arising in the body and dhatus. Helps remove phlegm in the throat, asthma and other pulmonary diseases. Ujjaya increases resistance to diseases of nerves, dysentery, dyspepsia, enlarged spleen, cough, fever.
Pitta	Shitali - Protrude tongue and make like a tube/straw. Draw air in through the mouth with a hissing sound and exhale slowly through both nostrils.	Quenches thirst. And appeases hunger. Cools the body. Destroys inflammation of chronic diseases, fever, indigestion, bad effects of poisons.
Kapha	Bhastrika - Means 'bellow breath'. Sitting in padmasana with eyes closed. Inhale and exhale quickly and forcefully using the diaphragm and belly.	Relieves inflammation of the throat, increases gastric fire, destroys phlegm, removes diseases of the nose and chest, eradicates asthma. Gives good appetite. Removes diseases that arise from vayu and bile. Gives warmth to the body. It purifies the nadis.