

ROLE OF PRANAYAMA IN PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH**Vd. Shraddha T. Hande***

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of Ayurveda is to maintain the health in a healthy person and to cure the disease by chikitsa; as well as with the help of upakramas that are explained by different samhitas under Swasthavritta. Amongst it, Ashtang Yoga explains the concept of Pranayama for the betterment of life. It is fourth anga or limb of Ashtang Yoga. The word Pranayama is made up of two Sanskrit words; Prana and Ayama. Prana means breath and Ayama means to control or regulation. Thus Pranayama means regulating the breath. Every living being breathes and through the medium of the breath, the flow of prana and life in the body takes place. If a person stop inhaling, the lack of prana in the body is felt, it will leads to discomfort and unrest to the body. If one is forced to keep on holding the breath, death finally comes. Therefore physical health can be gained by controlling

the prana Shakti through the practices of pranayama. Pranayama is the control of the Prana and the vital forces of the body. It is regulation of the breath. This is the most important step. Pranayama begins with the regulation of the breath for having control over the inner vital force. A correct habit of breathing must be established by the regular practice of Pranayama. If one controls the breath or Prana, the mind also is controlled. According to Ayurveda, role of Pranayama in physical and mental health is explained in this article.

KEYWORDS: Pranayama, Prana, Nadi, Exhale, Inhale, mental, strees.

INTRODUCTION

Pranayama is said to be the transition between the outer and inner world- the vehicle through which we internalize, feel the body and experience our inner life. So pranayama is the science related to vital force supplying energy and controlling the body mind complex.

Breathing is the process of taking in this vital energy and removing the waste products out of our body and mind. Generally breathing includes inhalation and exhalation but pranayama includes retention of breath (kumbhaka) as well. This is a very important process. The air can be retained in the lungs or out of the lungs. The ancient texts say that retention of air, increases the level of prana in the body, also it regulates the flow of pranic energy throughout the body. So pranayama helps remove all the ailments and also can stop the aging process of the body.

The reference of pranayama is seen in Patanjali yoga darshana, Sushruta uttarsthan dalhan, Gheranda samhita, Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Yadnya valkya, Vayupuran, Tejbhindhupnishad, gorakshanath, Shivasutravimarshini.

- According to Ashtang Yoga:

Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharna, Dhyana and Samadhi are the eight limbs of Yoga. Pranayama is the fourth limb of Ashtang yoga.

- Maharshi Patanjali gave five sutras for Pranayama:

“तस्मिन्सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोर्गतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः । ” -पा.यो.द.2/49

Pranayama is the regulation of the incoming and outgoing flow of breath with retention.

“बाह्याभ्यन्तरस्तम्भवृत्तिर्देशकालसंख्याभिः परिदृष्टो दीर्घसूक्ष्म । ” -पा.यो.द.2/50

Pranayama has three movements: prolonged and fine inhalation, exhalation and retention; all regulated with precision according to duration and place.

“ततः क्षीयते प्रकाशावरणम् । ” -पा.यो.द.2/52

With the help of regular practice of Pranayama it removes the veil (tamas and rajas) covering and it causes increase in Buddhi.

“धारणानु च योग्यता मनसः । ” -पा.यो.द.2/53

Pranayama helps to steady the mind, concentration, Dharana.

- According to Gorakshanath samhita

“प्राणोऽपि भगवानीशः प्राणो विष्णुः पितामहः ।

प्राणेन धार्यते लोकः सर्वं प्राणमयं जगत् ॥” -गो.सं.1/92

Prana is god shiva, Vishnu and Parabrahma. The entire universe is sustained by prana and Prana is omnipresent in the whole world. So this prana has to be preserved & protected with care, by proper cleaning of channels carrying Prana (Nadishuddhi).

- According to Gheranda samhita:

“प्राणायामात् खेचरत्वं प्राणायामाद् रोगनाशनम्।

प्राणायामाद् बोधयेच्छक्तिं प्राणायामान्मनोन्मनी।।

आनन्दो जायते चित्ते प्राणायामी सुखी भवेत् । ”

-घे.स.4/57

By Pranayama is attained the power of levitation, By Pranayama diseases are cured, By Pranayama the spiritual energy is awakened, By Pranayama obtained the calmness of mind and exaltation of mental powers so mind becomes full of bliss.

There are eight types of Kumbhaka in gheranda samhita.

1. Samhita Pranayama- Samhita pranayama have two types- Sagarbha & Nigarbha. In Sagarbha pranayama Bija mantra is used; Nigarbha pranayama is without bija mantra.
2. Surya bheda Pranayama
3. Ujjayi pranayama
4. Sheetali pranayama
5. Bhastrika pranayama
6. Bhramari pranayama
7. Moorcha pranayama
8. Kevali pranayama

- According to Hatha Yoga Pradipika:

Prana manifest the sthul rupa or gross form of the cosmic energy.

“चलेवातेचलंचित्तंनिश्चलेनिश्चलं भवेत् ।”

-ह.यो.2/2

When Prana moves chitta (mind) moves. When Prana is without movement chitta is without movement. By this, the yogi attains steadiness of prana.

“शुद्धिमेति यदा सर्वं नाडीचक्रं मलाकुलम्।

तदैव जायते योगी प्राण संग्रहणे क्षमः ।।”

-ह.यो.प्र.1/5

When impurities in all the channels (Nadi) and Chakras are purified, the yogi will be capable of accumulating Prana. The Prana vayu does not centre (sushumna), till the channels are purified. So purify Nadis through constant practice of Pranayama.

There are five main vayu types in our body which are responsible for pranic activities; they are apana, prana, samana, udana and vyana. The sthan or place Prana is the heart; Apana is the anus; Samana is the region of naval; Udana is the throat; while Vyana is all over the body. They are the different process and manifestation of one vayu. Out of these Prana and apana are most important. Prana is upward flowing and Apana is downward flowing. Pranayama achieves balance in activities of these pranas which results in healthy body and mind.

Nadi shodhana pranayama explained in Hatha Yoga Pradipika.

1. Sitting in padmasana, yogi should inhale through the left nostril and hold the breath to capacity and then exhale through the right nostril.
2. Then inhaling through the right nostril, gradually fill the abdomen perform kumbhaka (retention) as before then exhale completely through the left nostril.
3. Inhale with the same nostril through which exhalation was done, hold the breath to maximum capacity and exhale through the other nostril slowly and not forcefully.

When Nadis get purified following internal and external features are observed, leanness of body, lusture, increases digestion, resonant voice and good health.

The eight kumbhakas are Suryabhedana, Ujjayi, Seetkari, Sheetali, Bhastrika, Bhramari, Moorcha and Plavini.

SURYABHEDANA

1. Sitting comfortably, yogi should become fixed in his posture and slowly breath the air in through the right nostril.
2. Retention should hold until the breath diffuses to the roots of hair and tips of the nails. Then slowly exhale through the left nostril.

Benefits- “कुम्भकः सूर्यभेदस्तु जरामृत्युविनाशकः।

बोधयेत् कुण्डलीं शक्तिं देहानलं विवर्धयेत् ॥ ” -घे.स.4/68

- The surya bheda kumbhaka destroys decay and death, awakens the kundali Shakti, increase the bodily fire.

“ कपालशोधनं वातदोषघ्नं कृमिदोषहृत् ।”

-ह.यो.2/50

- The purification of vitiation of Kapala(sinuses), alleviation of vata & destruction of vata.

UJJAYI

1. Close the mouth, inhale with control and concentration through ida & pingla, so that the breath is felt from the throat to the heart and produces a sonorous sound.
2. Do kumbhaka (retention) as before and exhale through ida(left).

Benefits-

“न भवेत् कफरोगश्च क्रूरवायुरजीर्णकम् ।।

आमवातः क्षयः कासो ज्वरप्लीहा न विद्धते।

जरामृत्यूविनाशाय चोज्जारीं साधयेन्नरः । ”

-घे.स.4/72

Improves the lung capacity. Gastric fire is increased. It removes phlegm (kapha) in the throat, asthma, all sorts of pulmonary diseases are cured. Never attacked by diseases of phlegm, neves, dysentery, enlarged spleen, cough or fever. Perform Ujjayi to destroy decay and death. Beneficial in Jalodara (ascites) and diseases of dhatu.

SEETKARI

By drawing the breath in through the mouth, make a hissing sound without opening the mouth wide and exhale through the nose.

Benefits-

Reduces stress, anger and anxiety effectively. It removes hunger, thirst, laziness and sleep. It enhances body strength & destroys all complication.

SHEETALI

Inhale air through the tongue and practice kumbhaka (retention), then exhale the air through the both nostrils.

Benefits- “ गुल्म प्लीहादिकान् रोगान् ज्वरं पित्तं क्षुधा तृषाम्।

विषाणि..... ।। ”

-ह.यो.2/58

“ अजीर्णं कफपित्तश्च नैव तस्य प्रजायते । ”

- घे.स.4/74

- Purifies the blood. Free from indigestion, phlegm(kapha) and bilious disorders.

- It destroys an enlarged stomach or spleen, fever, excess bile, hunger, thirst and counteracts poisons.

BHASTRIKA

1. Sitting properly in padmasana, keeping neck and abdomen in alignment, exhale prana through the nose and again the air should be quickly inhaled up to the heart lotus.
2. In that way it is inhaled and exhaled repeatedly with the same motion.
3. When the body is tired then inhales through the right nostril.
4. When the abdomen becomes full of air, then quickly hold nostrils firmly without using the index and middle finger (as nasikagra mudra).

Benefits- “ त्रिदोषनाशकं चैव शरीराग्निविवर्धनम्। ” -ह.यो.2/64

Relieves inflammation of the throat, increases gastric fire, destroys phlegm, removes diseases of the nose and chest and eradicates asthma, consumption, etc. It gives good appetite.

BHRAMARI

Breathe in quickly, making a reverberating sound like bhramara (large black bee) and exhale slowly while softly making the sound of the black bee.

Benefits- “ एवं च भ्रामरीसंसिद्धिः समाधिसिद्धिमाप्नुयात्। ” -घे.स.4/82

Relieves stress, tensions, anger, anxiety, & blood pressure. Improves the voice & throat ailments. Beneficial in insomnia.

MOORCHANA

At the end of inhalation gradually become fixed on Jalandhara bandha, then exhale slowly, it makes the mind inactive and thus confers pleasure. It helps to enhance the mental energy.

Alleviates anxiety, tension, anger, neurosis, & raises the level of Plavini.

PLAVINI

Concentrate on the area between eyebrows, close eyes and relax whole body. Inhale gradually and deeply through nostril and fill air into the abdomen. Retain air as per capacity. Then exhale slowly through both nostril.

Benefits- It increases the capacity of body to sustain life for many days without food and water.

Regular practice of Plavini pranayama helps to gains the power to float on the water. It helps

to relax mind, body and to decrease stress.

Time for the practice of Pranayama- (ह.यो.P.2/11)

Morning, mid afternoon, evening & mid night are the time ideal for practice of Pranayama, one should gradually practice Pranayama up to 80 cycles.

Conducive food during the practice of Pranayama- (ह.यो.P.2/14)

During the practice of pranayama, consume milk & ghee and then take meals. After prolonged practice, this is not compulsory. The food consumed should be Satvika in nature.

Prohibited food during the practice of Pranayama- (घे.स.5/23)

In the beginning of yoga practice one should avoid pungent, sour, salt, bitter, roasted things, curds, butter milk, heavy vegetables, alcohol, pain & over ripened jack fruits.

Role in Physical and mental health-

“प्राणायामादि युक्तेन सर्वरोगक्षयो भवेत्।” - ह.यो.प्र.2/16

If pranayama is practiced in a proper way, it is capable of curing all the diseases.

Pooraka and Rechaka- Advantage of conscious exhalation is to develop conscious control over the relaxation response as it is associated with parasympathetic system by inhalation sympathetic system.

- Slow inhalation and exhalation in Nadi shodhana and Ujjayi provides more oxygen in blood decreases heart rate and thus decreases blood pressure.
- Speeding up inhalation and exhalation as in Bhastrika exercises the lung, abdomen and stimulates the nervous system to balance and strengthen itself.
- Washing away of CO₂ from the lungs, increased oxygen concentration in the lungs.
- Abdominal muscles are exercised, which improves flexibility and massages abdominal organs.
- Blood is saturated with higher concentration of O₂ which stimulates all cells to a greater activity level.
- Exocrine and endocrine glands get stimulated, thus their function get normalized.
- There is marked improvement in digestive process, which revitalizes the system.
- Metabolism is improved, catabolic and anabolic process of body is stimulated.

Kumbhaka- Kumbhaka increases the period of life.

The organs involved in respiration are the nose, the pharynx, the larynx, the trachea, the bronchi, and the lungs. And the nerves and blood vessels connected with these parts may be also takes as organ of respiration. Practitioners develop sensitivity to the respiratory process and retain the muscles of the pulmonary cavity, enhancing their vital capacity and preparing them for pranayama.

“प्राणायामं ततः कुर्यान्नित्यं सात्विकया धिया।

यथा सुषुम्नानाडीस्था मलाः शुद्धिं प्रयान्ति च।।”

- ह.यो.प्र.2/6

One should practice pranayama regularly with Satvika mind, so that the morbid matter present in sushumna Nadi gets purified & the flow of prana through it becomes regulated.

Rhythmic, deep and slow respiration stimulates and it stimulated by calm, content, states of mind. Irregular breathing disrupts the rhythms of the brain and leads to physical, emotional and mental blocks. It forms a bridge between the conscious and unconscious areas of the mind.

The state of the mind and that of the body are intimately related. If the mind is relaxed, the muscles in the body will also be relaxed. Stress produces a state of physical and mental tension. Physical postures and breathing exercises improve muscle strength, flexibility, blood circulation and oxygen uptake as well as hormone functions. It also has some connection with the hypothalamus, the brain center that controls emotional response. The hypothalamus is responsible for transforming perception into cognitive experience.

CONCLUSION

Pranayama has a good impact on positive thinking. The main advantage of pranayama is, it helps to overcome all the obstacles that block the flow of air from lungs to different parts of body and brain. It increases oxygen supply to brain, as low oxygen levels increase stress. Just taking a long breath for few minutes when you feel tense, will quite away all your tension and restlessness.

While doing pranayama, concentrating only on the way the air is taken in and released out. So, regularly doing pranayama increases concentration power. It is like a mind body exercise. It gives health and mindfulness, peace and connection to inner self, the spiritual soul. So

pranayama plays an important role physical and mental health.

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