

The Breath of Life: Full Yogic Breath

Pranayama Practice General Instructions

Let yourself yawn, moisten your lips, relax your face. Close your eyes. Calm your mind. Settle your body and begin to observe your breath. Let the breath come & go. Just noticing breathing in & breathing out. . . Allow the breath to move at an easy & natural pace – if there are quick breaths, simply noticing. If there are slow, deep breaths noticing.

Now being focusing your attention down to the lowest part of your abdomen. You can move your palms to the lowest part of your belly, with fingers pointing downward, sensing a subtle movement or warmth where your hands rest.

Let the breath move all the way down between the pubic bone and navel. Allow your belly to expand with your inhalation. Sense the nourishing energy of the breath traveling downward. Allow the belly to lower back towards the spine on the exhalation. Continue breathing in this way, perhaps drawing your baby deeper inside for warmth and safety as you inhale . . . then sensing how much more space your baby gains as the exhalation pulls your diaphragm upward.

You can use this calming centering breath at the beginning of your labor to establish a flowing soothing rhythm inside your self, to enter a quiet relaxed frame of mind through your breath. . .

Once you establish this comfortable rhythmic breathing to your belly you can begin to extend the breath upward. . . Rest the heels of your hands on the side of your ribs, fingers pointing forward so that you can breathe into your hands feeling expansion in your sides & around your back as your rib cage opens with breath. Allow your chest to expand sideways, as the breath moves in and up. Feel each rib moving away from its neighbor, expanding in all directions – especially from side to side. . .

Allow this sideways movement to create space all the way up to your under arms . . . continuing to feel the space between each rib widening creating more space for each in coming breath. Allow your upper back to broaden & expand, opening space between your shoulder blades as the breath moves up.

Allow your whole chest to deflate and release downward as you exhale.

Breathing fully from belly up into your chest energizing, revitalizing sustaining an open hearted uplifted posture. . . You can use this breath to help cope with moments of fatigue during your pregnancy or to build strength and energy in the early stages of labor. . .

Once you establish breathing from your belly to chest, release your hands; allow the breath to rise from the lowest part of your belly up to the uppermost top of your lungs. Notice the sideways expansion of your ribs, broaden & widen the ribs as you fill the lungs all the way to the top. At the end of the sideways movement the ribs begin to move forward and up, lifting the breastbone, the collarbones . . . yet shoulders stay relaxed, shoulder blades rest on your back.

Exhale and completely let go as your breath flows out.

Breathing and expanding the lungs right up to top can be empowering and strengthening, it can be helpful in late pregnancy with the diaphragm's movement is restricted by your growing baby.

Now sustain this full yogic breathing: inhaling as a wave up the body from your pubic bone all the way up to the base of your throat and then exhaling down the body again. Experience the rising up of your abdomen and the fully sideways expansion of your ribcage. Feel your shoulder blades moving down your back and pressing your spine forward. . . . Allow your lungs to expand completely as you take the breath right up to the collarbones.

Exhaling & feeling the movement of deflation flowing down the base of your throat to your pubic bone. Feel the ribs coming back together and the whole ribcage & belly settling downward.

This is the simplest most useful breath to cultivate throughout pregnancy: it energizes, calms & is a reassuring way to connect directly to your baby. Very often the richly oxygenated flow of blood it brings to the placenta prompts the baby to move.

At the onset of labor, establish full yogic breathing can calm, energize & build reserves of strength you can draw on in birthing. When the wave of breath flows up & down your body it can be encouraging to know that each inhalation nourishes you both. . . each exhalation releases both of you deeper into healing rest.