

Ujjayi Calming Breath

Pranayama Practice General Instructions

This is the soft audible breath your body does every night when deeply asleep – much like the sound of a baby’s breath as they sleep. Ujjayi slows, the breath, lengthening both the inhale & exhale by breathing through a slightly narrowed glottis. Ujjayi sends your body signals to enter a restful state.

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 gradually build the full yogic breath attuning to your natural rhythm: focusing your attention down to the lowest part of your abdomen. Let the breath move all the way down between the pubic bone and navel. Allow your belly to expand with your inhalation. Allow the belly to lower back towards the spine on the exhalation.

Once you establish this comfortable rhythmic breathing to your belly you can begin to extend the breath upward. . . feeling expansion around your sides & back as your rib cage opens with 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.

Once you establish breathing from your belly to chest 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 & continue to move the breath upward feeling 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.

Now sustain this full yogic breathing as you tune into your gentle, natural rhythm of breathing in & out through your nose: effortless. Let your face be soft. . . let your rhythm be easy.

Now simply shift your awareness to deep inside your throat. Continue to breathe through your nostrils but feel as though the breath is now coming & going through your throat . . . as if you were a fish with gills here drawing the breath in & releasing it out. . . Feel the breath passing over the base of your throat as if you were breathing through imaginary gills. . .

Allow a gentle sound at the base of your throat . . . like the breath you take as you drift off to sleep. Let the sound be gentle – even though the throat is slightly constricted – there is ease – there is softness. Continue breathing rhythmically as you maintain the same quality of sound breathing in & breathing out. Explore the sound that resonates with your being in this moment: so quiet only you & your baby can hear; like the sound of the waves of a distant ocean. . . As you listen to the distant waves imagine their rhythmic

Vibration is lowering you deeper into the source of peace . . .

You can use this breath to center & focus or when calm anxiety. Notice your level of alarm, then take 4 or 5 Ujjayi breaths as if it were drawing you back into your inner world of peace. Ujjayi is also helpful to ease yourself back to sleep . . . resting quietly with its rhythm is restorative & calming. . . Ujjayi’s gentle voice can have a lullaby effect on both you & your baby.

This gentle practice can work magically as an antidote to fear. At any point during your birthing practice, if fear or anxiety begin to set in, or if the peace of your birthing environment is disrupted you can turn your awareness to the conscious practice of Ujjayi coming back to your natural rhythm & the soothing sound of whispering waves, the gentle voice of the breath lowering you back down to the a place of peace.

You can let the sound of the breath get louder than the sounds of disturbing thoughts. This is the fast track to a relaxed breath & easy mind. It’s a powerful tool to use at times during labor when you need to gather your resources & settle into yourself more.

You can use this breath during the period between uterine surges to move into a state of deep calm & rest.

Babies recognize the calming power of Ujjayi. Its gentle rhythmic cadence & sound gently massage your baby as it continues to nourish & cleanse you both.