

Alternate Nostril Breath

Alternate nostril breathing has many names (such as Nadi Shodhana or sun and moon breath) and is practiced widely throughout many different genres of yoga. The aim of this breath practice is to harmonize the two hemispheres of the brain, allowing for balance in your physical body, mental awareness and emotional wellbeing. How does it do this? Firstly, when you pay attention to breath it automatically slows down. A slow deep breath activates the parasympathetic nervous system. The parts of your mind and body that say, "it's all good" and help us to find calm.

Secondly, when you breath through your left nostril the breath stimulates your right hemisphere. The right hemisphere or the "sun" side of your brain. This side of your head is the calculator and controls things like organization, planning, concrete thoughts and ego. This side is also your get up and go side. It controls the fire that gets you moving, which, out of balance can become stress.

When you breath through your right nostril, you stimulate the left hemisphere or the "moon" side of the brain. This side is the artist and is great at abstract problem solving, empathy, and making connections. This is you lets chill side. It controls your relaxation responses, and out of balance you can feel sluggish and tired.

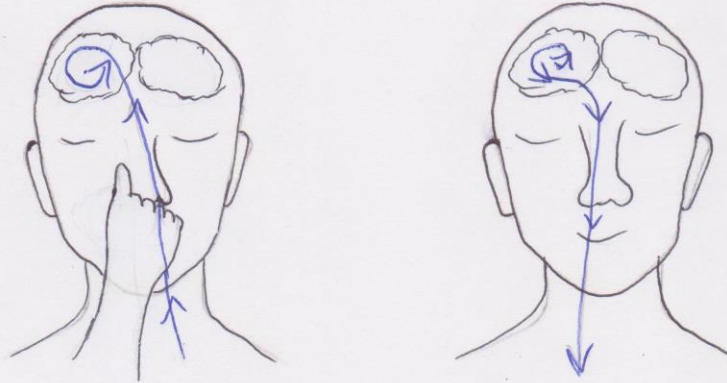
You can see how having both sides working together harmoniously would be beneficial. It opens both sides of the brain, increases relaxation response without diminishing focus. A side note – memories are often stored on both sides of the brain, so this practice can help to improve memory recall.

How to do the Practice:

Begin by finding a comfortable position. Check to see what nostril you are predominately breathing out of. Most of us tend to breath mostly out of one side and it switches throughout the day. It can depend on how your feeling and what you are doing.

Using your thumb or pinky finger, block off the right nostril so that you breath in through the left nostril. Imagine you can feel the inhaled air circling around the right side of your brain. Let go of the nostrils as you exhale, imagining the air is being breathed out your right nostril (as shown in the image below).





On your next inhale, block the left nostril with either your thumb or pinky finger. This time imagine the air entering your left brain and circling down the left nostril as you exhale (removing fingers from nose to breath out).

Repeat this for 5 to 10 breaths - or more (or less). Some like to recommend 15 minutes, but I personally find this too long. I like to do it for around 5 minutes. Then check to see what nostril you are predominately breathing with now. Is it different, the same or are you breathing equally through both nostrils? How do you feel (body, mind and emotionally)?

Variations:

1. You can block the opposite nostril on the exhale to really feel the switch. I.e. if you block the right nostril on the inhale then block the left nostril on the exhale and vice versa. You can also rest your other fingers on the spot between your eyes just above your nose, often referred to as your third eye.
2. You do not have to block either nostril. Just imagine on the inhale the air all going up one nostril then down the other on the exhale. It may take a bit of practice, but once you get the hang of it, the breath practice still works! Now you can practice this everywhere!