



YOGA *for asthma*

Asthma is an increasingly common and often chronic inflammatory disease of the airways, which causes constriction of the bronchial tubes which carry air into and out of the body. Restricted airways make breathing extremely challenging and as a result of this, asthmatics tend to breathe more rapidly due to the conditioned 'fight or flight' response. Common recurring symptoms along with airflow impediment are the production of mucus and tightening of local muscles around the respiratory tract, the ribcage, shoulders and neck. There is often wheezing, coughing and gasping or panting for breath. Asthmatics frequently have allergies and poor digestion too.

When I was at school, I was the only child in my year with asthma. Today about one-quarter of children are being diagnosed as asthmatics. When left untreated, it can lead to permanent lung damage and even death. An attack can be triggered by an assortment of allergens and irritants, from dust to dander and, most commonly from dusk to dawn. Over exertion, environmental pollutants, inappropriate consumption of food, medicines, alcohol and illicit drugs induce a daze that clouds a solution. In order to understand symptoms, yoga reveals the psyche and hence the causes of difficulties. Each individual travels through the previously unconscious tapestry of their lineage, healing the past and shaping a brighter now.

At the age of two, I remember sitting on the top-loading washing machine in our bathroom, waiting to breathe. In hindsight I learned about my non-dual self, within the body

but not bound by it. Meditation is the most beneficial practice and during the following thirty three years I unlearned 'holding on' and grace healed my asthma. The asthmatic unable to exhale, clings to the past, often feeling sorry or guilty. I resisted help, love, medicine and friends, all of which make life in this world terribly difficult. At five I practiced pranayam, followed by yoga nidra; restorative conscious sleep. In moments of non-doing I somehow let go of trying to do the technique, to be calm, to feel relaxed. There was radiance. I am not the 'body feeling relaxed' or 'the mind or body unable to relax'. I am the observer of both, unmoved by either and present, all ways. For me, asthma was also about acceptance. I denied myself medicine or felt guilt taking it. One day anger ruptured my heart which spoke, "be the peace you are looking for Matthew?" I had finally admitted myself to the inner clinic, where non-duality severed the asthma. The following asana (stance or seat) and pranayam (energy expansion) practices are for when the 'asthmatic' is free of symptoms. The relaxation techniques are especially important during an attack. You are the observer of the body and its emotions. In embracing underlying fear, one becomes courageous. If one is too engrossed in the internal dialogue associated with an attack, relaxation isn't possible.

Relaxation and non-resistant tensile awareness, lead to mental softening and dispassion to the physical difficulties. Symptoms of attack may continue for weeks, months or years, yet progressively one removes oneself from suffering.

In hindsight I recommend using prescribed medication, eastern or allopathic, so that you can focus energy on the practices. You may see resistance to using medicine; in hindsight one sees the cure in the pain. Eat natural food and find who the 'I' is, in 'I'm asthmatic'. What we seek is within, beneath the layered labels. Slow down. Re-Lax. Inquire. What is the Self or Soul? What is this Bliss that saints talk about? Through deep relaxation and meditation awareness reveals our blocks; like addictions and aversions. One learns to be non differential, reducing preferences, which makes us more resilient. When you are calm, acknowledge this. Your autonomic nervous system hears your instructions and implements new programs on a moment by moment basis. The brain becomes hard wired (fixed patterns), so that dysfunctional neural pathways make it impossible to change events. When we relax, we run new software. Programmes may not be 'perfect' at first, but your intention to relax and observe gradually takes over.

WHEN YOU ARE WELL;

Practice Surya Namaskar (sun salutations) to increase physical and mental strength and agility. Backbending will open the chest and heart, allowing you to stretch your lungs, gaining confidence that it is safe to breathe fully. Learn to breathe in to your pelvis, belly and ribcage from the root to the top of your head, so that your system remembers how to breathe fully once again. Forward Bending will facilitate relaxation. Inversions will clear your mind and renew your perspective. They help clear the mucus in the chest or head which causes much mental and physical congestion. They also build great strength and stamina, so that the mind is especially prepared for the next stage of any cycle it enters. Standing and seated twists will help to liberate your spine and relax chronic tension in the connective tissue that supports the skeleton. You will find them refreshing and relaxing, especially the supine ones.

As your body gets stronger and more elastic you will see the problematic psycho-somatic chains loosening, as symptoms that used to aggravate and cause an attack, no longer will. A wonderful feeling informs us that mind and body are layers of ghostlike memory veiling the permanent inner luminosity.

Practice Savasana (corpse pose), occasionally with light weights on the body. Breathe fully. Practice Yoga Nidra in savasana to reveal the ego, senses, mind, and their true light, the Self; the source of them all and the essence of which, is the same in us All.

PRANAYAM

Breathe out for longer – Exhale through the mouth, "Haaaaaaaaaaaa", for as long as comfortable. This strengthens the diaphragms, vital for healthy respiration.

Lengthen the exhale pause – Lengthen (and count) the pause after the exhale, a little at a time. Practice a few rounds, so that you can observe the more you relax, the easier and longer the pauses. Allow the inhale effortlessly – Having performed the above two exercises calmly, you can observe the inhale as natural inflow, below and behind the navel, rather than a grasping on to dear life. Inhale 'I accept life', exhale 'I let go, I relax'. Do this a few times, smiling into your being.

UJJAYI BREATH

Repeat the above exercises with the mouth closed; inhale and exhale 'haaaaaaaa'.

KAPAL BHATI (SHINING SKULL BREATH)

Practice dynamic exhalations, the inhale is passive. Exhale 10 short breaths, inhale one full one. Alternatively, exhale a rapid breath, allow a pause and passive inhale, and then repeat 10 times. Pause and repeat a few more rounds.

BHASTRIKA (BELLOWS BREATHING)

Practice dynamic inhalation- the exhale is passive. Try ten to a hundred rounds. Pause and repeat as comfortable. (Avoid with high blood pressure).

NADI SHODANA (ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING).

Cover right nostril, then exhale and inhale through left. Switch to the other side. Repeat the cycle for five minutes. Full Yogic Breath. Isolate the body cavities; pelvis, abdomen, ribcage, neck and skull. Starting from the bottom upwards, isolate and breathe into them. Then connect and breathe into them all, from the tailbone to the crown.

If any of these practices trigger symptoms of an attack, rest and return at a later date. Let practice be the medicine and God the healer.

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