

Alternate Nostril Breathing

You can use the index fingers of each hand to close the respective nostrils, alternating hands – this is particularly useful when you are learning the technique. Once you feel comfortable with alternate nostril breathing, you can use the thumb and ring finger of one hand to close your nostrils, folding the index and middle fingers into your palm. This is sometimes referred to as Murgi (deer's head) mudra as the thumb and ring finger resemble the horns of a deer.

When you close the nostril, use a light touch of your finger or thumb just above the flared part of your nostril. If you press on the flared part of your nostril it will stick to your septum, making it hard to breathe.

Try to bring your hand to your face, rather than turn your face to your hand. The techniques detailed in this handout all include ujjayi breathing through both nostrils, which is a good opportunity to rest your hand as your arm can get tired if it is continually held up to your nose.

Alternate nostril breathing is best avoided if you have a cold, hay fever or your nasal passages are blocked in any other way.

Anuloma Ujjayi - *calming*

- Inhale ujjayi breath through both nostrils.
- Close your right nostril, exhale a long quiet breath through your left nostril.
- Inhale ujjayi through both nostrils.
- Close your left nostril, exhale a long quiet breath through your right nostril.
- Repeat for a minimum of twelve breaths

Viloma Ujjayi - *energising*

- Exhale ujjayi breath through both nostrils.
- Close your right nostril, inhale a long quiet breath through your left nostril.

- Exhale ujjayi through both nostrils.
- Close your left nostril, inhale a long quiet breath through your right nostril.
- Repeat for a minimum of twelve breaths

Pratiloma Ujjayi – balancing

- Exhale ujjayi breath through both nostrils, inhale ujjayi breath through both nostrils.
- Close your right nostril, exhale through your left nostril, inhale through your left nostril.
- Exhale ujjayi breath through both nostrils, inhale ujjayi breath through both nostrils.
- Close your left nostril, exhale through your right nostril, inhale through your right nostril.
- Repeat for a minimum of twelve breaths

Using your hand to count your breathing

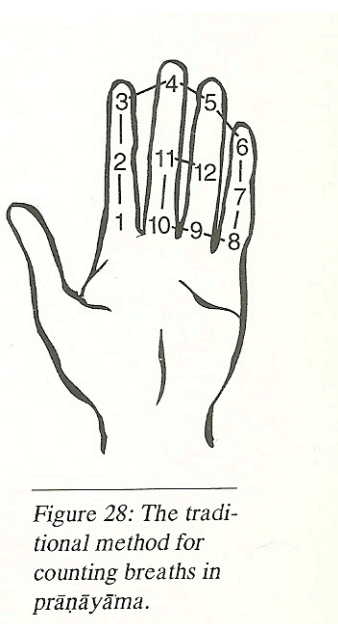


Figure 28: The traditional method for counting breaths in prāṇāyāma.

If you are using one hand to close your nostrils, you can use the other hand to count the number of breaths you have taken. Touch your thumb onto the joints of the fingers in the numerical order as illustrated here. An inhalation and an exhalation counts as one cycle of breath.

(illustration from *The Heart of Yoga* by TKV Desikachar)