

Certificate in Integrative Palliative Care – 3
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Week-03

Lecture 27: Yoga Interventions for Physical and Mental Health

In this module, we will take Pranayama as a yogic intervention for enhancing mental and emotional health. We will cover essential breathing techniques such as natural breathing, abdominal breathing, thoracic breathing and clavicular breathing which promotes deeper relaxation and cognitive clarity. Additionally, we will delve into Nadi Shodhan Pranayam and Ujjayi Pranayam to balance energy meridians and pranic flow and calm the mind. We will also examine the therapeutic use of Yog Mudras for palliative care, focusing on their role in reducing stress and enhancing well-being. Each practice aims to provide tools for emotional resilience, mental clarity and overall health improvement. Insecurity, fear and guilt along with various physical discomforts can lead to loss of hope, despair and depression.

Yoga offers a powerful way to reconnect with one's inner self or a higher power, providing strength, peace and inner joy that can lift us out of a gloomy state of mind and help re-establish lost confidence and faith in the higher self. To achieve these benefits, let's explore and practice a few key yogic breathing techniques. Insecurity, fear and guilt, along with various physical discomforts, can lead to a loss of hope, despair and depression. Yoga offers a powerful way to reconnect with one's inner self or a higher power, providing strength, peace and inner joy that can lift us out of a gloomy state of mind and help re-establish lost confidence and faith in the higher self.

To achieve these benefits, let's explore and practice a few key yogic breathing techniques. We'll first practice natural breathing. This is a simple technique which introduces practitioners to their own respiratory system and breathing patterns. It is very relaxing and may be practiced at any time. Awareness of the breathing process itself is sufficient to slow down the respiratory rate and establish a more relaxed rhythm.

Let's look at the technique to practice natural breathing. Sit in a comfortable meditative position or lie in Shavasana and relax the whole body. Observe the natural and spontaneous breathing process, observe the natural flow of the breathing process, develop

total awareness of the rhythmic flow of the breath. Feel the breath flowing in and out of the nose. Do not control the breath in any way.

Observe that the breath is cool as it enters the nostrils and warm as it flows out. Observe this with the attitude of a detached witness. Now feel the breath flowing in and out at the back of the mouth above the throat. Bring the awareness down to the region of throat and feel the breath flowing in the throat. Bring the awareness to the chest.

Breath is flowing through the tracheas and bronchial tubes, filling the lungs. Be aware of the lungs expanding and relaxing. Shift the attention to the rib cage and observe the expansion and relaxation of this area. Slowly observe your abdomen, shift your focus to the abdomen and feel the abdomen move upward on inhalation and downward on exhalation. Observe the abdomen the whole time during inhalation and exhalation.

Observe moving up on inhalation and contracting as you exhale. Finally become aware of the whole breathing process from the nostrils to the abdomen. Observe the flow of breath from the nostrils to the abdomen and from the abdomen up to the nostrils. Continue observing it for some time. Now, bring the awareness back to observing the physical body as one unit.

Become aware of the physical body and relax. This practice can be very easily performed by the subjects who are in their end stage of life also. Practicing this daily for a few minutes will help the subjects to relax the agitation in mind and calming down the anxiety and restlessness. After natural breathing, now we practice abdominal breathing. To practice abdominal breathing, we continue to sit in the same posture or relaxed in supine position.

Slowly place the right hand on the abdomen just above the navel region. Let the abdomen relax. Do not try to force the movement in any way. Here take a few deep breaths. As you breathe slowly and deeply feel the abdomen expanding and contracting.

Observe that with every inhalation the abdomen moves outwards and with every exhalation the abdomen comes inwards. Continue practicing for a few minutes. Awareness on the abdomen. The movement of the abdomen should be observed during the practice of abdominal breathing. You can extend the practice from 5 minutes till 15 minutes or as long as you are comfortable.

Now from here we practice thoracic breathing. Move the right hand upwards and place it on the chest. The left hand is on the knees, palms open, relaxing. Begin to slowly inhale by expanding the rib cage. Feel the movement of the individual ribs outward and upward.

Be aware of this expansion drawing air into your lungs. Expand the chest as much as possible without forcing it. On every breath, individual ribs are moving outward and upward. Breathe slowly and deeply through the chest with total awareness. Continue practicing for a few more minutes, pausing slightly after each inhalation and exhalation.

Next, we move the hands further upwards towards the clavicle bones or the upper chest for the practice of clavicular breathing. To practice clavicular breathing, begin to slowly breathe and observe the movement of the clavicle bones. Observe the movement of the clavicle bones. As you inhale deeply, observe the collarbones expanding and moving upwards expanding your upper chest. Exhale slowly, allow your collarbones to lower and upper chest to relax.

With inhalation, collarbones are moving upwards. With exhalation, collarbones are moving downwards. Continue for a few more cycles. Awareness on the movement of clavicle bones moving up and down on every inhalation and exhalation. Expanding and contracting the upper chest.

Gently relax and come in Sukhasana. Relax both of your palms back on the knees. Once these techniques become a part of daily life, there will be a great improvement in the state of physical, emotional and mental well-being. The practices which we have just done are specifically recommended for the terminally ill subjects as the subject can easily adjust and practice into lying supine position. Now we will practice Nadi Shodhan Pranayama.

For that be aware of the whole body. Spine is straight. Whole body is relaxed. Neck, shoulder, hands are relaxed.

Gently close the eyes. Left hand is resting on the knee either in chin or Gyan Mudra. Make the Nasagra Mudra with the right hand that is touching the index and middle finger to the base of your thumb and using the thumb and ring finger to open and close your nostrils. Now close the right nostril with the thumb and inhale and first exhale through the left nostril five times. Inhalation and exhalation is happening through the left nostril itself.

Slowly inhale and exhale. Two more times, inhale, exhale. Take a deep breath in and out. Once five rounds are completed on the left side, close the left nostril with the ring

finger and practice breathing five times with the right nostril. Inhale and exhale through the right nostril. The movement, the flow of the breath should be natural.

Observe the breathing happening only from the right nostril. Once five rounds are completed on the right nostril. Then gently release Mudra from both hands and relax. Observe the whole body. Observe breathing happening through both the nostrils.

Practice five rounds or at least three to five minutes to achieve greater calming effects. Nadi Shodhan Pranayama should not be practiced if suffering from cold, flu or fever. Breathing through the left nostril activates the right hemisphere of brain and breathing through the right nostril activates the left hemisphere of brain, thereby balancing the energies in both hemispheres of brain. This practice helps clear the 72,000 energy channels called as nadis in our body that may be blocked, alleviating issues at various levels of physical, mental and emotional well-being. We will practice one more pranayama which is Ujjayi pranayama or the psychic breaths.

To practice Ujjayi Pranayama, bring your awareness from nostrils to your throat. Imagine that the breath is being drawn in and out of the throat only. Inhale deeply through throat and exhale longer through throat, making a hissing sound or ocean's waves by gently contracting the glottis. The sound of the breath should be audible to practitioner only. Continue practicing for a few minutes more, inhaling deeply through, inhaling deeply through throat and exhaling longer through throat.

People who are too introverted by nature should not practice this. Ujjayi is also called the tranquilizing pranayama which soothes the nervous system and calms the mind. It has a profound relaxing effect at the psychic level. It helps relieve insomnia, slows down the heart rate. It is also very useful for those who have a weak heart and who has difficulty in breathing.

So, by regular practice of the demonstrated pranayama helps in promoting calm mind, reducing anxiety and increasing in vitality. These practices can lead to overall general vitality and rejuvenation of the cells which are otherwise fatigued in chronic illnesses. Thank you.