

Bhastrika and Kapalbhata

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Self-healing Circle, Chesterfield Psychic Study Group

These pranayams (breathing techniques) clear obstructions in the respiratory system, strengthen the nervous and immune systems and enhance metabolism, physical vitality, and clarity of mind.

They should not be practised on a full stomach or if you are pregnant, have epilepsy or uncontrolled hypertension. You also need to be careful if you have hernia given the vigorous effort of the diaphragm and abdominal muscles.

Our Circle viewed the following videos, which show that there are variations in how these methods are practised. You will find other variations on youtube.

Bhastrika – or bellows breath pranayama

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fwUzavktVI>

A fun workshop in Slovenia on Bhastrika, in which both breathing in and breathing out are forceful. See also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhastrika> Swami's imitation of a steam engine is helpful.

Kapalbhata – or shining skull pranayama.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2oZX1s6nuM> –

This demonstrates the forceful exhalation of breath to punch up the diaphragm followed by a natural intake of breath. The video also demonstrates the holding of the breath after breathing in and out respectively.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPm8M3OqVx0>

Kapalbhata - Myths & Reality by Dr. Satish Pathak

Dr Pathak, a retired heart surgeon, points out that most modern diseases such as heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes mellitus are caused by our lifestyles and not by pathogens. In this video he provides anatomical evidence in support of the breathing practices used more than 3000 years ago by Indian sages. He shows that the various chakras have corresponding nerve plexus with the same number of connections as the petals described by the sages. The nerve plexus are connected to the endocrine glands/organs. The breathing techniques he demonstrates are believed to energise the chakras, and the functioning of the organs leading to better health. He demonstrates the Omkar method, i.e chanting Om while focusing on the breath, which he says activates the chakras.

He then focuses on the need to enhance the huge capacity of the lungs to oxygenate the blood. He says that the normal breath only lowers the diaphragm by about 1 cm and that the diaphragm can be displaced down by 7 to 8 cm with deep breathing exercises to increase lung capacity. He demonstrates Kapalbhata, and also Ujjayi pranayama and explains the physiological processes which make them beneficial. These methods not only cause the expulsion of foreign substances from the lungs and respiratory passages but they also generate heat which dries up the excess moisture in the lungs, the retention of which provides the breeding environment for pathogens.

Dr Pathak also explains why the holding of the breath is an important part of pranayama. Holding the air breathed in causes air pressure and movement in the lungs, which open up the alveolar ducts in the lungs. He recommends these methods of cardiac breathing to avoid heart attack.