



Kriyas: Cleansing Practices

Saucha refers to “purity of body” and encourages “purity of mind”. The ancient Yogis developed the six cleansing techniques (*Kriyas*) for “purification” of the physical body. Through these simple daily practices, nature is assisted in the elimination of waste.

1. Nasal Cleansing (*neti*)
2. Stomach Cleansing (*dhauti*)
3. Intestinal Cleansing (*basti*)
4. Abdominal Churning (*nauli*)
5. Respiratory System Cleansing (*kapalabhati*)
6. Steady Gazing (*trataka*)

Nasal Cleansing (*neti*)

Neti cleanses the nose, nasal passages, and sinus cavities. Practiced daily, it helps to counteract the effects of pollution, dust, and pollen. It is especially beneficial to people with asthma, allergies, and other respiratory problems.

Using a neti pot, lean over a sink, tip your head to the side, and breathe through your mouth. As you slowly pour a pot of pure water through the left nostril, it irrigates and cleanses the nasal and sinus areas, and comes out the right nostril. Blow well. Repeat on the other side. Add to the neti water a pinch of quality sea salt (the solution of tears), and a little sesame oil to coat and protect the mucus membranes. If needed, you can also add anti-microbial and anti-viral ingredients to your nasal wash.

Neti pots are available at health food stores or through The Himalayan Institute: www.himalayaninstitute.org. Without a neti pot, you can simply fill your cupped hand with warm water and inhale it into the nostril, then blow it out.

Stomach Cleansing (*dhauti*)

Dhauti cleanses the esophagus and stomach by removing excess mucus and food. Ancient yogis swallowed a strip of gauze, then pulled it out. More simply, you can practice conscious healthy nutrition. According to Ayurveda (the ancient health system from India) in order to reduce Ama, the residual impurities deposited in the cells as the result of improper digestion, first thing in the morning drink hot water with fresh lemon juice, and sip hot water through the day. Scrape your tongue with a tongue scraper each time you brush your teeth to remove the Ama from your tongue, and awaken the taste buds. To tone the muscles of the esophagus and stomach, initiate a gag reflex by placing your finger to the back of the tongue.

Intestinal Cleansing (*basti*)

Basti cleanses the lower large intestine and strengthens the abdominal muscles. Ancient yogis did cleansing practices such as an enema. More simply, drink plenty of pure water, enjoy regular exercise, and eat lots of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, to support the ease of daily elimination. Give yourself a daily internal organ massage by manipulating the abdominal organs, moving in a clockwise direction (best practiced lying down and with bladder empty). This tones the abdominal organs, and aids elimination.

Abdominal Churning (*nauli*)

Nauli massages and invigorates all the internal organs, and strengthen the muscles used for breathing and elimination. Central Nauli: Stand with legs apart, knees slightly bent, and hands resting on the thighs. Bend slightly forward, take a deep breath, exhale fully, then draw the diaphragm upward (*uddiyana bhandha*). Without taking a breath, rhythmically draw the muscles in and out. Abdominal Churning: press harder on the thighs, and shift the hips back and forth to produce a smooth side-to-side wavelike motion. This is best practiced in the morning with empty bladder and bowels.

Respiratory System Cleansing (*kapalabhati*)

Kapalabhati purifies the nasal passage and the lungs, helping the body eliminate large quantities of carbon dioxide and other impurities. The added intake of oxygen enriches the blood and renews body tissues, while the movement of the diaphragm massages the stomach, liver, spleen, and pancreas. Sit with spine long, and close your eyes. Focus on your breathing. Rhythmically, take fast vigorous inhalations, exhaling fast and forcefully, like a bellows. With each exhalation, contract the abdominal muscles to force the air out of the lungs. Then relax the abdomen, allowing the air to return to the lungs. The exhalation is active, the inhalation is passive. Practice a *mula bandha* with each stroke of the exhalation, to retain the energy you are creating. Repeat 20-40 times, for 3-5 rounds.

Steady Gazing (*trataka*)

Trataka improves eyesight and concentration, and can be used as a preliminary exercise for meditation. Placing a candle at arm's length, at eye level, gaze at the flame without blinking for 1-3 minutes. Your eyes will water, cleansing the eyes and the tear ducts. Then close the eyes and visualize the flame at a point between the eyebrows.

Inversions

Placing the body in an inverted position each day improves circulation of the blood and lymph, nourishes the glandular system, and soothes the nervous system. Inversions help concentration and clarity of the mind as fresh blood is brought to the brain, and are a helpful aid to sleep. When in the inversion, breathe smoothly and gently. Avoid inversions if on your menstrual cycle, or if they cause pressure in the eyes or head.

1. **Viparita Karani:** Lie on your back with your hips close to a wall (hips may be on a folded blanket or bolster) and your head on a thinly folded blanket. Swing your legs up the wall so they are vertical, and resting gently. Close your eyes or use an eye pillow.
2. **Water Fall:** Lie on your back as above, with the calves resting on a chair or a bed.
3. **Happy Baby:** Lie on your back and raise your arms and legs vertically above you, and wiggle them gently or allow them to rest in stillness.

(Inspiration from *Yoga, Mind & Body*, by the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Center.)

Emotional Cleansing

“E-motion” is energy in motion. All emotions are simply energy moving through your body. Like a garden hose or a stream, if we keep our vessel open with regular healthy expression of emotion, we flow through life. If there is a crimp or blockage, then emotion begins to build resulting in breakdown of the vessel, rupture, or disproportionately large release.

Keep your emotions flowing, without pursuing them, amplifying them, indulging in them, or identifying with them. With a regular healthy flow of emotion, you make a choice not to repress, deny, ignore, avoid, or self medicate them, which may result in their leaking out in disharmony in your health, relationship to yourself, or your relationship with others.

Your body is like a barometer that gives you information to guide your choices, values, self care, and direction in your life. Sadness, grief, and tears are energy expressions of the heart. Anger is a powerful energy that indicates that something is important, something matters, or something is not O.K. for you. Anxiety and fear are energies that may indicate the need for safety, protection, or self care. You can go toward the emotional energy, meeting it with gratitude, kindness, and curiosity. Use your feelings as an opportunity for cultivating self awareness, compassion, and personal transformation.

Take full responsibility for your feelings and their expression. No one can “make” you feel a certain way. Always release emotion apart from the triggering circumstance or person, in a way that feels safe and causes no harm to yourself, another, or to property. Take time alone to explore the two aspects to releasing emotional energy. One is to physically express it using movement, breath, and sound: walk, run, dance, kick, punch, breathe deeply, let sound come through – whatever can move the energy through your body. The other is to give it a voice: journal it, speak it, yell it, sing it, paint it, collage it – whatever gives expression to your unique truth and experience. When you feel complete, take what you have learned about yourself back into your world to deepen understanding and compassion for yourself and others. If you feel unsettled by your emotions, seek the wise counsel of a trusted friend, guide, or therapist.

Know that relationship to yourself, others, and life goes through cycles of harmony, disharmony, and repair – often many times in a day. Keep your heart open to the dance of life energy moving through you.