

Camp Utopia Yoga

Kriyas



Cleansing Techniques for the ancient and modern yogi

The word Kriya means action, deed, operation, or effort. In general terms, it refers to any practice with the goal of attaining higher knowledge. Different forms of yoga maintain different practices, so the use of the word Kriya can vary widely. For Hatha yogis, Kriya refers to cleansing techniques to prepare the body for asana and pranayama practice. Hatha yogis are focused on purifying the body as a means of attaining enlightenment. All Hatha yoga techniques, including asana, pranayama, and cleansing, promote total body health, protect the body from disease and decay, and make the meditative practices easier to maintain. However, few of the traditional yogic techniques are used in Westernized modern yoga – some difficult to perform, and seem unnatural and even revolting to Western practitioners. Other techniques are easy, and you may already do them, or might try to incorporate them into your cleansing rituals.

There are 6 categories of cleansing, called Shatkriyas or shatkarmas.

- Neti (nasal cleansing)
- Dhauti (washing – this will include body, mouth, ears)
- Nauli (abdominal purification)
- Bhasti (colon cleansing)
- Kapalbhathi (brain and sinus)
- Trataka (optics and psychic facilities)

Particularly if you are detoxing, external cleansing techniques can speed the cleansing process, or help you avoid feeling sluggish and irritable during fasting and detoxification.

Cleaning the Eyes: Trataka

Mainly intended for developing concentration and mental focus, Trataka is performed by gazing steadily at a particular point or object. This practice also helps to improve eyesight. Below are three variations:

- Keep a candle flame (or other small object) 3-4 feet away from the body. Your eye gaze should be level with the candle. Sit erect and keep the spine straight and the body relaxed. Stare at the flame with a steady gaze. After a minute close the eyes, relax the eye muscles and visualize the flame between the brows.
- Bhrumadhya Drishti (frontal gaze): Half close your eyes and turn them up towards the space between the eyebrows. By directing the gaze at this point the olfactory nerves and optic nerves are stimulated and the autonomic nervous system is awakened. Try to hold for a minute or two; rest with closed eyes between sets.
- Nasagra Drishti (nasal gaze): Gaze at the tip of the nose for two minutes. Avoid strain; if you feel any pain or tiredness, close the eyes and relax the eye muscles.

Repeat and practice a few times. This strengthens the eye muscles and increases concentration power by fixing all the attention toward the tip of the nose and through it, to the central nervous system.

Cleaning the Ears: Wax Candling

Although many claim it's origins are found in ancient Ayurveda, and some say it's the best thing in the world, others claim that ear candling can be downright dangerous. The theory is that the burning "candle" pulls wax out of your ears and into the base of the candle. Best done with a friend to watch the flames, simply cut a hole in a paper plate to catch the ash, place the candle into the ear – not deep, simply insert it to the opening of the ear canal, and light the wide end above you. Shortly, you'll feel sensation in your ear. Blow out the candle when it is 4 – 5 inches tall.

Cleaning the Nose: Neti

In order to perform pranayama effectively, the nostrils must always be clean. Neti means cleaning of the sinuses. Sutra-neti is performed by inserting a fine waxed thread nine inches in length into one nostril and pulling it out of the mouth. Jala-neti uses lukewarm salt water and a Neti pot to clean the nostrils, and neti posts are in common use today, found in most pharmacies and health food stores.

Use ¼ teaspoon of natural mineral salts and warm water, place the tip of the neti pot on your right nostril and tilt the head, tucking the chin slightly to avoid having the water pour into the throat. Tip the water into the nostril and allow it to drain out the other nostril. Do both sides, blowing your nose and rinsing your mouth between sides.

Cleaning the Mouth: Brushing, Flossing, Tongue Scraping & Oil Pulling

1. Brushing and flossing daily? Keep up the good work.
2. Tongue scraping is a simple technique that is said to scrape harmful bacteria off the tongue, improving overall health, dental health, bad breath, and infectious airborne diseases.
3. Oil pulling is a semi-controversial possibly Aruyvedic technique, said to pull toxins out of the whole body, and cure every disease. There are an equal number of websites calling it a hoax. Regardless, everyone agrees – it whitens and brightens your teeth. Take a tablespoon of oil in your mouth and swish it vigorously around the teeth, tongues, gums and throat for 10 – 20 minutes. Begin at 3 minutes and increase daily.

Cleaning the Skin: Dry Brushing

Dry skin brushing is an easy, pleasurable cleansing ritual that takes only a few minutes, yet keeps your skin clean and fresh, invigorates the blood flow, and leaves you feeling tingly and vibrant all over. Beginning with a soft brush is best to avoid damaging delicate skin, although many people use rougher loofah brushes. Always brush in long strokes

toward the heart, and 7 strokes in each area – from the feet to the heart, and from the head and face down. Make circles on the abdomen.

Cleaning the Nasal Passages and Lungs: Khapalabhati

Kapalabhati is an exercise for the purification of the nasal passage and lungs. It translates as Skull Shining, because the sinus cavity is in the skull and this technique cleans, or shines, the sinuses. It is used to control the movements of the diaphragm and to remove spasms in the bronchial tubes. Persons suffering from asthma will find this very helpful. It removes impurities of the blood and tones the circulatory and respiratory systems. It stimulates every tissue of the body. Great quantities of carbon dioxide gas are eliminated. Intake of oxygen makes the blood richer and renews the body tissues. The constant movement of the diaphragm up and down acts as a stimulant to the stomach, liver and pancreas.

Exhale deeply and sharply and feel the muscles of the diaphragm pull your navel into the core of the body. This is very active; the practitioner quickly and forcibly contracts the abdominal muscles with a backward push. Immediately after, the abdominal muscles relax. The inhale is passive, mild, slow, and longer than the exhalation. The exercise is repeated for a minute or more, with a rest between each cycle. Attention should be focused on the abdominal muscles, centered in the solar plexus and navel, where the vital energy is stored.

Cleaning the Internal Organs: Sthala Basti & Nauli Kriya

Sthala Basti gently stimulates the bowels and digestive system. It helps relieve gas and constipation, giving the body a lighter, more energetic feel.

Sit with your legs extended in front of you. Grab the big toes and bend forward, bringing your head toward your knees just a little, relaxed and comfortable. Relax your belly, and then begin “churning” – pulling the abs up and down. Lock the mulabandha. Don’t push yourself too hard, it should feel comfortable, and it is best to practice on an empty stomach. Practice it for several rounds.

Nauli Kriya also improves digestion and constipation, and reduces belly fat. It strengthens the abdominal muscles and removes sluggishness in the stomach, intestines and liver; it also improves circulation.

From a standing position, with the feet hip width distant and the knees slightly bent and your hands resting on the thighs. Exhale completely and then pull the belly all the way up and in, engaging uddiyana bandha. Hold your breath. Perform the same churning exercise, except try to move the belly in more of a side to side rolling motion than simply up and down, and do it as quickly as you can, for as long as you can without discomfort. Between each round, breathe deeply for a few minutes, and work up to several rounds, eventually churning the belly about 100 times.