

## Yoga for Life

# THE POWER OF MINDFUL BREATHING

By Janet Hennard

Mindful breathing. It is so fundamental to yoga that you will most likely spend a few minutes practicing it at the beginning or end of each class. Your teacher will remind you to be aware of your breath while holding a pose, and when moving from one pose to another. In yoga, the practice of mindful breathing is called *pranayama*, a sanskrit word that combines *prana*, meaning “life force” with *ayama*, meaning “to extend or draw out.” Pranayama increases oxygenation, lowers blood pressure, improves concentration, and promotes a feeling of well-being.

Try this powerful exercise called *nadi shodhana*, or alternate nostril breathing, at any time for a quick way to calm anxieties, improve sleep and even help reduce pain.



### PRACTICING ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

■ Find a comfortable place to sit with an upright spine, either on the floor cross-legged or on a chair with your feet on the floor. You can also stand if you can be still and straight. You'll use your right hand throughout the exercise.

■ Start by folding down the tips of your right index finger and middle finger to touch near the base of your thumb. Your thumb, ring finger and pinky should be free.

■ Close your eyes or leave them open in a soft focus.

■ Take a deep, slow breath through both nostrils, then close the right nostril with your thumb and exhale slowly and completely through the left nostril. Now inhale slowly and deeply through the left nostril. At the top of the inhale, close the left nostril with your ring finger and/or pinky and open the right nostril to exhale. Exhale completely, then inhale completely through the right nostril. Now close the right nostril with your thumb again, and open the left nostril to continue alternate nostril breathing.

■ Practice for at least 5-10 minutes.



**You don't have to be in a yoga class to practice mindful breathing. Try it whenever you need to experience a sense of calm.**

You can practice alternate nostril breathing at home, in your office, or wherever you have a few minutes of stillness. And don't forget to practice— with eyes open!— while you're waiting at a long stoplight. You will likely find that you've calmed those anxieties about being late! ▶

**Janet Hennard,** MA, RYT500, C-IAYT, is a registered yoga teacher and certified yoga therapist



who teaches classes in the Dallas area. She also offers private yoga sessions for those with special needs.