

VILOMA PRANAYAMA

“The more we can begin to exert control over the finer details of the breathing process, the more possible it then becomes to control the finer details of the mental process” ~ Saraswati Niranjanananda

Viloma means *to go against the natural flow*. And in this pranayama technique, we interrupt the natural flow of our breath to cultivate breath control and awareness.

How to Practise Viloma Pranayama

Viloma has three stages, with each building logically on the last, so that you create smooth breaths with evenly spaced pauses — and this starts with pausing during the inhalation only.

Viloma Stage 1: Interruption of Inhalation

Sit in a comfortable meditation posture to begin. Allow the body to relax, and begin to notice the natural breath. When you're ready, start to move into full yogic breath, but without effort. As you inhale, do so in steps, stages with a little pause between each, until fully inhaled. And then exhale as one smooth exhalation.

Remember that the pauses in each inhale should feel comfortable and not strained. And the exhale that follows is long and smooth.

Viloma Stage 2: Interruption of Exhalation

In the second stage of this practice, start just as you did with the first stage. Come to that natural breath awareness, before moving into full yogic breath. And then:

- Take a smooth, full and quiet inhale without any interruption. When the inhale is complete, pause — hold the breath in for a moment.
- Begin to exhale slowly, and then pause and hold. Exhale just a little more, then pause and hold again. And once more — so there are a total of 3 interruptions in the exhale. This may rise to 5 when you've fine-tuned your control.
- When the lungs are completely empty, take a momentary pause at the end before you inhale slowly and smoothly. This will come naturally with practice.

Viloma Stage 3: Interruption of Inhalation and Exhalation

In the final stage of viloma pranayama, you aim for long, steady inhales and exhales, with an even number of pauses inserted into each. This is often called *stepped breath* — imagine you're walking up and down a set of stairs and stopping for a moment at each step.

From your seated position, and having already settled into the first two stages, begin:

- Start to inhale softly, and then pause. Continue with the inhale, adding between two and five more pauses before the inhale is complete.
- Exhale softly and pause. Continue with the exhale, inserting the same number of pauses as you did on the inhale.
- Between each round of one inhale and one exhale, take one normal breath.

Benefits:

- Helps to calm and focus the mind
- Helps to develop control over breath flow
- Extends the duration of breath and expands the lung capacity for both inhalation and exhalation
- Removes stale air with outgoing breath, brings fresh oxygen with inhalation
- Used in preparation for Nadi Shodhana, bhastrika and kapalabhati

This practice is not suitable for anyone with:

- Obstructive Coronary heart disease
- Chronic bronchitis or asthma
- High blood pressure