

Ep #116: Nadi Shodana: Nostril Breathing for a Calm Clear Mind



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Susi Hately

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Male Announcer: You're listening to *From Pain to Possibility* with Susi Hately. You will hear Susi's best ideas on how to reduce or even eradicate your pain and learn how to listen to your body when it whispers so you don't have to hear it scream. And now here's your host, Susi Hately.

Welcome, and welcome back. With this episode I want to dig into Nadi Shodana, which is a breathing technique that is found all over the place in yoga. And if you are new or if you're a seasoned yoga practitioner, stick around because for both of you it will be a great practice. It'll be new for the newer practitioner, but for the seasoned practitioner, you'll probably learn a thing or two around some of my preferences for how I do the practice, which can be totally game changing for your own experience of how the practice impacts you.

To get into the practice, let's look at what Nadi Shodana actually means. So loosely translated in the modern world, Nadi Shodana is alternate nostril breathing. Which really means that we're breathing through one nostril and then breathing out the other nostril, breathing up that nostril and then out the first nostril. So it's all focused in around nose breathing.

A little yoga background, Nadi is a channel very similar to the meridians in Chinese medicine theory. Shodana means purification. So what you're doing with the practice, according to yoga legend, is you're clearing out and purifying the subtle channels. Now fast forward many, many, many, many, many years and science gets interested in the Nadi Shodana practice and other breathing practices.

When science has actually looked at this particular practice, Nadi Shodana, what they have found to be so is that when practiced, a significant number of people will experience a clearer and more alert mind, improved ability to concentrate, better respiration, lower blood pressure, and for some, deeper breathing.

And anecdotally, from my clients, they'll tell me that there's a lot less mental drama. So it's one of their go-to practices when they're their brain is ping

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ponging and pin-balling all over the place. It's a way to really help bring that brain to a quieter place and settle down, and calm and down regulate.

So you might find yourself really loving this as a technique, and I've had clients use it to help them get to sleep at night, help recover from insomnia. When they wake up in the morning if they're feeling a bit frazzled it's a way to settle themselves down before they get out of bed. So lots of different practices.

Now, as you practice this and you find that you really enjoy it, if it really resonates with you, you'll probably really like my mechanics of breathing. Which is a biomechanical look at breathing and you get lots of chance to practice. And that program is one of my signature programs that sits inside of Healing and Revealing Human Potential. And we are opening up registration for that right now.

And you can read more details on that at functionalsynergy.com/synergy. It really is my program where, I mean, as you've heard me on this podcast, I mean, symptoms are really interesting. And getting rid of, eradicating, reducing symptoms is really interesting. But more what I'm interested in is the conversation under those symptoms, like where healing can really happen. What's the story? What's the message that the symptom is providing us?

And so when we start to explore there and integrate that with biomechanics, and anatomy, and exercise physiology, some really cool stuff can happen on a recovery and a healing plane. So if that is of interest to you, you will want to look out at that website at functionalsynergy.com/synergy, or you can just email us directly at health@functionalsynergy.com.

Okay, so let's get into Nadi Shodana. I'm going to walk through some of the specifics, but first I want to talk a little bit about nostril dominance. And this is a topic I've become very interested in. I'm going to give you a little blurb, and just know that in a future episode coming up I'll be getting more into

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nostril dominance because it's really interesting what science is beginning to know.

I mean, the yogi's knew this for a long, long time. But now science is catching up and bringing some really black and white understanding to what's going on and how these breathing techniques are supporting us.

What's important to know, though, about nostril dominance is that we don't breathe equally through our nostrils all of the time. So the way that we inhale air from the space up through our nose does not equally happen between the left and right nostril all the time.

We have a dominant cycle where the left will be dominant for an hour or two and then it will switch to the right, is typically how it cycles through. One side then the other side, one side then the other side. Obviously, if you've got a congested sinus or nose, that won't happen, which can sometimes be one of the reasons you feel so disrupted. But in a normal state of affairs it shifts left to right.

And what science has been able to determine is that there is a relationship between nostril dominance and the cerebral hemisphere that is active. So cognitively speaking, your right hemisphere is more active when your left nostril is more dominant. So it's the cross patterning, so right hemisphere to left nose, and right nose to left hemisphere.

So it becomes really cool because what we're learning more about left and right hemispheres and how cognitively they function, they just provide different outputs for us. And so as we start to understand the way that our breath is, we can tune that much more into the way that our brain functions. And that can help understand the fuel that is being utilized for the task at hand.

So it becomes really interesting, both from a perspective of recovery and healing, but also from this place of peak performance, mental clarity,

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getting the job done, getting tasks done, introspection, falling asleep, digestion. That's just another tool now with our nose.

And as you practice Nadi Shodana it brings that awareness to the way that your nostrils are functioning. It just brings you that much more connected to yourself and can quiet you down that much more to really tune into some of the subtle anatomy that the yogi's, like I've said, yogi's have known for so, so, so long, that we can really mine from and dare I say hack from, and really tune into what is possible for our physiology and for our lives.

So with that as an introduction, let's explore Nadi Shodana. And when you're looking at practicing Nadi Shodana, there are some teachers out there who are very, very specific about the hand position, also known as a mudra, that you utilize on your nose.

And so some teachers are very particular about your thumb going on your right nostril and your pinky finger and your ring finger going on your left. So I'm talking about the right hand here. So right thumb to right nostril, ring and pinky finger of right hand to left nostril.

That is something that I am not picky about. That is not one of my preferences, and the simple reason for that is I have so many clients who are unable to do that with their hand, whether it's because of carpal tunnel syndrome, or hand, or wrist, or shoulder, or neck, or I mean list all the number of things that can get in the way of utilizing one hand. If someone's had a finger or thumb amputated or it's just not working, I mean, there's so many factors.

So the actual hand that is used, the digits that are used, I don't have a preference over. Where I do have a preference and where I do get specific about in teaching is the amount of pressure that you place on your nostril and where you put that pressure.

I found that when I learned where to put my fingers and or thumb, it became a game changer. Because what I used to do is I just would slap my

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hand up to my nose, well maybe not slap, but I'd just sort of place my hand up on my nose and close the nostril and off I went.

But then when I learned about the placement, specifically at the indent where the bridge of the nose comes down before the flare of the nostril, then I could tune that much more quietly into the way the airflow was coming in and out of my nose. And that just quieted my system down even more, tuned me that much more into my own inner world.

And that was really interesting from both a concentration, mental focus, and also a peak performance place. It felt like my breathing came alive when I did that. And then when I started to teach this to my clientele, which has now been, oh, probably about 17 or 18 years now, they found something similar as well. So that's why I'm sharing this particular preference with you today.

So how I want you to play with this is I'm going to teach this using the index finger. If you utilizing the index finger does not work, just choose any other digits. And you're going to place that index finger, I'm using my right finger on the right bridge of my nose. And I'm going to slide down the right side of the bridge of my nose and I'm going to feel the indent and then I'll feel the flaring of the nostril.

So I'm going to take the tip of the nose and just place it in the indent. And then notice as you press the indent inward to close off the nostril, just get a feel of how much pressure you need to push that nostril closed. Okay, that's the first place. So it doesn't require a lot of pressure.

So those of you listening who are are total go-getters and like you're pounding, just ease off on that. Make it a lot, a lot lighter. Think about like teaching a small child had a pet a dog, like it's that kind of pressure that we're looking at. Go really, really gentle so that you can feel the subtlety here.

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Okay, so now what you're going to do is close off the nostril very gentle. And then open it up a little bit, open the nostril up, keeping the finger where it is. And now breathe through that right nostril. I want you to do your best to keep that breath going through your nostril very easily. Inhale and exhale, keep it super soft, as natural and as normal as you can make it.

And feel what your finger that's at the indent of your nostril can pick up. And if you can't pick up anything, then press a little bit more, close off that nostril a bit more, but still allow breath, still allow air to get through the nostril. So you want to put just enough pressure that you can feel the movement of the nostril into your fingers as the air goes through.

Okay, nice. Now close off that right nostril and then breathe solely through the left nostril. So you don't have your finger or any other thing on your left nostril here, you've just got the nostril closed off on the right and you're breathing in and out through the left. Okay, so now gently open that right nostril again, breathe out through the right nostril. And notice what you feel on the finger.

Okay, so that's the general practice we're going to do with what I'm going to show you next. The traditional way that many people teach is they place the thumb, the right thumb in the indent of the right nostril, and then the pinky finger and the ring finger on the left nostril. You can kind of hear my nose starting to do that.

And then they place either the middle finger and the index finger at the bridge of the nose or they curl in those fingers, it totally is up to you. Alternatively, you can just use both hands and place the index fingers one on one side, one on the other side, just like that. And so you can just do that index finger and index finger, or you can really use any other digit that you want. So whatever is easiest.

Okay, so next we're going to begin by just breathing through both nostrils. So you're going to inhale and exhale. Inhale and exhale through both nostrils. And put a little bit of pressure on that indent so that you can feel

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the air coming in through both nostrils. And you might even notice how one nostril is more dominant than the other. You might not, don't worry, just whatever you notice there.

Do this two times more and then when you're ready you're going to close off the right nostril and breathe in through the left. When you reach the top of the inhale on the left, close off the left nostril, open the right nostril and breathe out through the right nostril.

But remember, we're not just taking the hand off of that right nostril. Feel the air coming out of that nostril. Let that finger on the right side feel the air coming out. Feel the pressure against that indent. When you have all the air out of the right nostril, then start to inhale back up through the right nostril, close off the right nostril, and then breathe out through the left.

Now the pace that I just went may have been way faster than your breathing, not to worry. It may have also been way slower than you breathe, not to worry. I'm going to let you go at it now where you're going to breathe in through the left, close the left, breathe out through the right.

When you're done breathing out through the right leave the right open, breathe up through the right and then out through the left. So it's like an upside down U or a horseshoe where you're going up through one, the left, down through the other, the right, up through the right, and then down through the left. Tuning into how that air is moving in the nostril by way of feeling it with your fingers or your thumb that's touching the indent of your nostril.

So you keep rolling here. I'm going to give you a couple of minutes to explore this. And while you're doing it just notice if there's any increase of tension anywhere or any increase of gripping. And if you're not feeling good doing this, just let the practice go.

There you go, just notice what you're experiencing. And take one more repetition where you'll fully exhale out your left nostril. There you go. And

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then when you're done let your hands come down and breathe through both nostrils and notice what you now experience.

If you're finding that the breathing technique supported you in quieting your mind and deepening your breath, you're feeling that impact of the down regulation, you're noticing the power of what shifting your breath can provide you, something so simple, right? So, so simple and so, so powerful.

We did that breath exercise for about, from the time I started explaining it to you to now, about two minutes. Generally speaking I recommend to practice breathing exercises at first for anywhere between five cycles and 10 cycles, as opposed to minutes to keep it easy and short at first. And then as you've noticed that you're feeling better and you're feeling good, then you can add on time.

What I find that is different about breathing practice and breathing exercises that some could say is different than strength training is I'm not one to want to increase load very quickly at all. I want to make sure that I'm noticing the settle, the calm, quieter, improved ability to concentrate, more alert mind, all those things. I want to make sure I am noticing those before I add more repetitions.

There's no need to increase repetitions if you don't need to. If the amount or the dosage of the stimulus is working for you, there's not a need to increase. So you can stick with what's actually working and then if you feel like internally that there's a little desire to go more, then try a cycle or two more, try a minute or two more and notice what's happening.

But really tune in to the response of your system to the practice itself as opposed to a training program, like an externally driven training program. Tune into what your system is needing and how it's responding to the activity that you're doing. Okay, and enjoy Nadi Shodana.

And hey, if you really love this and you want to dig more into the amazingness of breath along with movement and stillness and take your

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healing and recovery process to the next level and really get into that conversation under the conversation, you'll be working with me three times per month, along with a group of other people who are very much like-minded who are well on their way towards less pain, eradicated pain, better human performance.

We've got a whole curriculum where we dig deep into these concepts. Plus you get access to Susi's resource library, like all the things and we support you all the way. So what I recommend you do is go to functionalsynergy.com/synergy and you'll get all the goods. Or, of course, you can email us at health@functionalsynergy.com. See you next time.

If this episode has resonated and you're looking to deepen this idea of getting your body back on board, of listening deeply to your symptoms, of listening to the whispers so you don't have to hear the screams and you're looking for one to one support or professional training, then reach out to us at health@functionalsynergy.com where we can customize your learning path. That's health@functionalsynergy.com. Looking forward to hearing from you.