

Heart-Opening Kriya

This Kundalini set of yoga postures or exercises works directly with the heart area - physically & energetically.

On a physical level, it opens and strengthens the muscles of the upper back, upper chest and neck area. It also opens and strengthens the arms and the core - especially exercise #2.

On an energetic level, this kriya (set of yoga exercises) open, clears and balance the Heart Chakra - Anahata Chakra or the Fourth Chakra.

The Heart Chakra is associated with love, compassion and forgiveness. An open and clear heart chakra helps us feel more connected to life and to other people. One might feel softer, more loving and kinder after practicing this kriya on a regular basis - I know I do!

There are also benefits to the heart and lungs - while the postures or exercises are not strenuous, once you build up to doing each one for five minutes, you're giving both your heart and your lungs a good work out.

Using Breath of Fire (see page 9 for instructions) in Postures #2 and #4 also improves circulation and helps to detoxify the system.

As with any yoga though, don't take my word for it. Do the series, do it regularly, and note for yourself what you feel on the physical, emotional, mental and energetic level.

Always take your time getting familiar with each posture. Rest when you need to and pay attention to your breath - it should never become short or laboured.

Don't over do it! There's a fine line between staying committed and pushing yourself too far.

Consistency will pay over time - start with just 30 seconds on each posture until you get the feel for it, and then increase to one minute. Stay there until you feel a natural inclination to go longer in each posture.

Use a timer so you're not always trying to guess how long you've been in each posture. In general, keep the gaze soft, and focused on a point in front of you about where the wall meets the ceiling.

Enjoy!

1. Chest Flys



Sit up straight in easy cross-legged (sukhasana). Use a cushion or block under your pelvis if your knees sit too high. Your pelvis tilts forward slightly.

Bring your arms straight out to the side with your palms facing forward. Keep your hands in line with the shoulders and the arms aren't further back than your shoulders. This is your starting position.

On an exhale, bring your arms directly in front of you to where the hands meet, as if you were going to clap - but don't clap.

On an inhale, return to the starting position, making sure that you don't flail your arms further back - stay smooth, strong and controlled.

Start slowly and allow your body to speed up and find it's own comfortable pace.

Keep the sternum open and lifted and the back of the neck long - fixing your gaze where the wall meets the ceiling helps!

2. Ringing the Bell



Oh I love this one but it's the trickiest to get right, because our natural inclination is to let the alignment slip. But our alignment is absolutely key - not only does it protect our lower back, but it also allows the energy to flow effortlessly up the spine.

Start by extending your legs out straight in front of you, and lean back slightly. Just enough so you're able to still hold yourself up strongly!

Flex your toes toward you, engage your quadriceps and firmly press your legs down into the ground. This is the support that allows your torso to fly up towards the sky.

Keep your core engaged and lift your sternum up towards the sky. Don't sag through the belly!

Make two fists and put your thumbs inside your hands.

Fix your gaze skyward and reach up with your hands, alternating pulled one down and then the other. It's like you're ringing a bell.

Check your foundation again as you continue to strongly ring the bell.

Flex the feet, engage the thighs, engage the core, lift the sternum!

Keep a moderate to fast pace in this exercise. You can do it!

If you're familiar with Breath of Fire Pranayama (see page 9 for instructions), use Breath of Fire to help turbo-charge this posture.

3. Relax in Savasana (Corpse Pose)

Oh yes, savasana! Now you get a well-deserved rest.

Lie flat on your back, with your palms facing upward and slightly away from the sides of the body.

Relax your body completely and just breath.

Stay present inside your experience - don't let the mind wander!

4. Double Arm Rotations



We're back to sitting cross-legged, same as the first posture.

This time, extend your arms out in front of you, parallel to the ground, making fists the same as you did while ringing the bell.

Again, if you're familiar with Breath of Fire, you can use this pranayama to turbo-charge double arm rotations.

Make sure you've got enough space to swing your arms in a wide circle, being mindful of not whacking your knees.

Start by moving the arms out and down and around, up and over, and then back to the middle where they started.

Arms move in sync, doing nice big circles in front of you, as wide as is comfortable given your natural range of movement.

Keep steady and strong and let the breath carry you.

This will feel uncomfortable - don't stop! Stay with it. Count each rotation as a way to motivate yourself.

5. Shoulder Flies



This is the last intense working exercise in this series, so any energy you've got left, use it up here!

We're doing a similar exercise to the first one - only this time, instead of bringing the arms together in front of us, we're bringing them together above our head.

Sit cross-legged, bring the arms out shoulder-height, palms face up, straight arms.

As you exhale, bring the arms together above your head. Don't clap, but make sure the hands almost touch.

Inhale as you bring your arms back down to shoulder-height. Don't let them sag any lower than that.

Stay smooth and controlled, going at a reasonable pace.

You may be tempted to give up on this one, but stay motivated. It's only one minute out of your life and you have the strength to do this!

Again, counting can help with motivation. Count to ten, and to ten again. And ten more, until your timer goes off.

6. Neck Rotations, Left & Right



You may feel some tension around the neck and shoulders area as a result of the arm exercises. Now is your chance to release it. If you've got any neck issues, move slowly and with caution and don't go too deep.

Sit cross-legged again, with your hands on your knees.

Close your eyes and open your mouth - this is important. Opening the mouth keeps the jaw relaxed. You're likely to unconsciously close it during the exercise, so keep reminding yourself - open mouth!

Move your head around in a slow circle, in one direction. Allow yourself to speed up to a pace which feels freeing without straining your neck at all.

There may be some strange cricking sounds as you move around, pay attention to those sounds and if it feels like you need to slow down, do so.

Slow to a halt with the eyes still closed, and when you feel centered, repeat on the other side.

7. Relax in Savasana (Corpse Pose)

You've done it!

Now, lie back and let all the different sensations wash over you.

Keep your awareness firmly in your body and just allow yourself to release and soften into whatever you're experiencing.

Tune into the chest, heart and neck area in particular.

Take longer in this second Corpse pose - 2 to 5 minutes at least.

And that is it - seven postures, initially practiced for just one minute each. A mere seven minutes out of your day.

But what benefits!

Like any yoga, the affects of this kriya are accumulative.

I've been practicing it off and on now for six or so years and even now, I'm learning new things about the alignment of each posture.. I'm also noticing a new clarity about the way energy moves through my chest, heart and neck area.

I encourage you to set an intention to practice a minimum of a week to really get to know the postures. Ideally, you'll do a Forty Day practice.

After Forty Days of practicing exactly the same kriya every day, you'll know the postures inside out. They have time to sink into your system - physically, mentally, emotionally and energetically.

Seven Minutes. Forty Days. Life-Changing.

And if you need some extra help and encouragement to do those Forty Days, you can find it in [Forty Days of Yoga, click here.](#)

Many Blessings, Kara-Leah

Breath of Fire Pranayama

Some consider this an advanced breathing technique, and suggest it needs to be learned from a teacher, rather than a PDF, book or a website.

As always, trust your own intuition on this. If you're familiar with Ujjayi breathing, deep abdominal breathing or long deep breathing, you're likely ready to explore Breath of Fire. I learned from a website, no adverse affects!

Start with just one minute or so and pay attention to how it feels in your body. If you get any tightness in the chest, or anything that feels alarming, discontinue Breath of Fire and use regular breathing throughout the kriya.

Breath of Fire: Contraindications

If you're menstruating, you may not want to use Breath of Fire, as the navel centre is a strong part of this practice. However, I find it makes no difference to me, and generally practice Breath of Fire whether I'm menstruating or not. That said - maybe there's subtle things going on I'm not aware of that are not that beneficial to me...

Breath of Fire is also contraindicated for high blood pressure, heart disease, hernias or suffer from stroke or epilepsy. Plus use caution if you have acid or heat related gastric issues such as ulcers, or if you suffer from vertigo. And if you're pregnant, it's also advised not to do this.

Any doubts, don't do it, and consult an experienced yoga teacher in person. Keeping you safe is what it's all about!

Breath of Fire: The Benefits

I can't personally vouch for all of these benefits, but this is what the Kundalini Research Institute has to say about Breath of Fire.

They maintain that regular practice can build lung capacity, clear your respiratory system, balance your sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, heat your body to increase energy, boost your immune system, build concentration, reduce addictive impulses and improve your sense of well-being. Breath of Fire also oxygenates and detoxifies your blood.

It sounds like a whole lot of benefits, just from using a breathing exercise - but that's why pranayama is so powerful.

Breath of Fire: Similar but Different Pranayama

Don't confuse Breath of Fire with Kapalabhati, or skull-shining breath. That particular pranayama emphasizes the exhalation, whereas Breath of Fire has an even emphasis on both inhale and exhale.

The other commonly confused pranayama is Bhastrika, or Bellows Breath. The focus here is on the stomach though - you actively pump your stomach in and out as you inhale and exhale, whereas in Breath of Fire, the belly action happens automatically.

Breath of Fire: The Practice

If at anytime you feel acute discomfort, or dizziness, stop at once and let your breath return to normal. Start with just one minute, and get comfortable there before proceeding.

Take a comfortable seated position, such as kneeling on your heels or sitting in easy cross-legged. If you need a block or cushion underneath you to lift up your pelvis and allow it to tilt forward slightly, make sure you sit on one. If you're cross-legged, your knees should be the same height or lower than your hips. If they're not, a block or cushion is key.

Release your sitting bones to the earth and lengthen your tailbone toward the wall behind you. Feel yourself connect to the earth beneath you.

Extend the crown of the head towards to the sky, and gently bring your chin in slightly - this aligns the spine with the back of the neck.

Rest your hands in a comfortable position and close your eyes.

Allow your belly to relax.

Focus your attention on the tip of your nose and breath rapidly through the nose with the same emphasis on the inhale and the exhale. It sounds like a train almost, and feels like very fast sniffing.

Keep your breath shallow, focusing on the top of the nose, and go at a steady pace with a regular rhythm.

Allow the belly to pulse along with the nose breath - this happens of it's own accord and you don't have to think about it too much.

And that's it - simple, but strange when you first start. Just start relaxed and keep the awareness on the tip of the nose.

Practice for 1 minute at a time initially.