

Pranayama

Victorious Breath: Seated

Ujjayi Pranayama

Starting Position: sit comfortably with your back well aligned; place your hands on the sides of the rib cage with your fingers pointing downwards. Beyond the alignment of the spine, the position of the elbows is of fundamental importance. They should be in line (or anterior) to the body.

Your throat is partially closed during the inhalation and if desired also during exhalation; the air would then pass over the back of the throat. Breathing will naturally expand the torso laterally. While initially the breathing sound can be accentuated in order to deepen the experience of the exercise, with regular practice it should become similar to a very soft hissing sound, a whisper, a light tickle of the throat.

Start with the lungs empty, relax belly and pelvic floor and allow the diaphragm to be pulled downwards by the weight of abdominal and pelvic organs (the alignment of your pelvis and spine ensure lateral and posterior expansion).

Apply the Thunderbolt Gesture (Vajroli Mudra), slightly close the glottis and inhale. The diaphragm will open the lower ribs laterally initiating a deep thoracic breathing. Imagine the ribcage as an umbrella that you open with the inhalation. The body becomes light. Mula Bandha is spontaneously activated during the inhalation and released during exhalation as the ribs drop. In the learning phase, you can dedicate some extra attention to the gentle movement of the pelvic floor.

A correct execution can be verified observing two important external parameters: there's no vertical movement in the shoulders and the rib cage experience a wide lateral expansion.



Ujjayi is very different from paradoxical breathing, which is characterised by blocked diaphragm and a prevalently vertical breathing movement with negative effects like anxiety, vertigo, and tachicardia.

Start with 3 to 5 minutes of practice and then gradually increase to longer periods. When finished, return to normal breathing for a minute or two. Ujjayi can also be performed with complete retention, while in supine, erect, or even when walking.

Contraindications: when the exercise is performed without retention, there are no contraindications.

Benefits: this breathing technique improves oxygenation of the body-tissues and has a euphoric effect. It is especially recommended to those who have asthma; when this technique is fully mastered, it helps in controlling symptoms of moderate asthmatic crisis.