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PRANAYAM



Note

So far, we have studied yam, niyam and asan described by Maharishi Patanjali in Yog Sutra. According to Ashtang yog, Pranayam is the fourth component. Here you must have to understand that after getting expertise in asanas one should start practice of Pranayam and this is described in all yogic scriptures. Ordinarily, every human being breathes from birth to death, unceasingly. But the question arises, how the breathing process of a common man is different from the one who is practising Pranayam? So first, we should be aware about the normal breathing pattern properly. Pranayam is the only connecting link between body and mind. Patanjali, in his text of yog Sutra, mentioned Pranayam as means of attaining higher states of awareness. The word ‘Pranayam’ implies control on pranas i.e., to attain control on breathing. In this lesson, we will learn about different types of breathing, how to control breathing, the types of Pranayam and how it affects our body, mind and soul.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

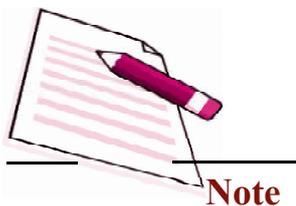
- explain the meaning of Pranayam and its importance;
- elaborate Pre- Pranayam practices;
- describe the components and types of Pranayam and
- explain the method of meditation through Pranayam.



21.1 PRANAYAM AND ITS IMPORTANCE

The word Pranayam has two Sanskrit roots - ‘Prana’ and ‘ayam’. “**Prana**” means vital energy and life force. “**Ayam**” means stretching, extension or expansion or control. Thus, we can say that the word Pranayam means extension or expansion of Prana or ‘breath control’ to extend and overcome one’s normal limitation of Prana. Therefore, it should not merely be considered as a breathing technique to provide extra oxygen into the lungs. It influences the flow of Prana in the Nadis of the Pranamay kosha. Controlling Prana through Pranayam steadies the mind and cleanses the body, thus it boosts the overall health and well-being of the





practitioner. Thus, the technique of Pranayam provides a method by which the life force can be activated and regulated in order to go beyond one's normal limitations and attain a higher state of experiences.

Importance

Pranayam is one of the important vital components of yog that directly or indirectly affects the proper functioning of different systems of the body. Once you understand the right breathing technique, this can create a huge impact on your thoughts and actions. Pranayam practice provides people the freedom from any harmful and negative mental conditions such as depression, anger, arrogance, excessive greed for money and more. In addition, regular Pranayam helps extend life and enhance perception. By practising Pranayam, you can control mind's fluctuations and prepare yourself for deep meditation.

21.1.1 Scriptural Reference about Pranayam

Pranayam is an important part of yog practices and is mentioned in almost all texts in yog. Maharishi Patanjali defines it as -

- **“Tasminsate swaspraswasiryorgativichchedah pranayam”**

Pa. yo.su.2.49

Which means, after getting expertise in asana there has to be regulation or restraint of speed of swas (inhalation) – praswas (exhalation) is called as Pranayam.

- **“Chale vate chale chittam, nischalam nischale bhavet**

Yogisthanutyamapnoti tato vayum nirodhayet”

Ha. Yo.pra.2.2

“When *Prana* fluctuates then the *Chitta* (mind) also fluctuates; when the *Prana* becomes steady then the *Chitta* also becomes steady”. So we should try to control *Prana*.

It means Pranayam practices are intended to bring about calmness in the mind by harmonizing the Pranic flow in the body.

We see warning in one *Shloka* in Hath Yog Pradipika (Ch 2.16). i.e., “Pranayam can remove all diseases if it is done correctly; if it is done incorrectly then it can actually cause illness”

This is the indication about Pranayam. It is a very advance practice, so one should slowly and systematically develop one's ability to perform Pranayam techniques over a period of time under the guidance of an expert.





INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.1

- 1) Name the root words of Pranayam with their meaning.
- 2) Mark the following statements as 'True' or 'False'
 - a) Pranayam is considered as only a breathing technique to provide extra oxygen to the lungs. ()
 - b) Pranayam is an important part of yog and is mentioned in almost all texts of yog. ()
 - c) Pranayam can be practised even after not getting expertise in asanas. ()



Note

21.2 PRE-PRANAYAM PRACTICES

Let us know about Pre –Pranayam Practices:

The process of Pranayam is concerned with the breathing which is an indicator of life. So, if it is done in a wrong manner, it may harm us as we have just studied. Therefore, it needs some preparations. As we know that Pranayam is advanced yogic technique. A sound and healthy body is a must for the practice of Pranayam.

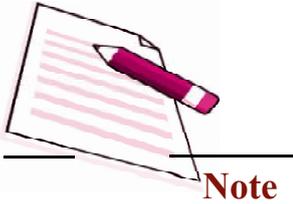
In the last topic, we have discussed about Prana, Pranayam and its impact on our life. Now we will learn about pre-Pranayam practices i.e. about the preparation technique of Pranayam practices. They are-

21.2.1 Asana

There are so many practices which are advisable for Pranayam and for the preparation of Pranayam. To successfully practise and attain the full benefits of breath control and pranayam, it is necessary that it be built on the solid foundation of a steady and comfortable sitting posture. The **spine should be straight** and perpendicular to the floor so that respiratory muscles can do deep breathing which is an essential requirement. Bad and poorly performed posture will lead to shallow breathing and low stamina. So, Asan is given utmost importance. So one should develop expertise in any one of the following Asanas-

- Siddhasan,
- Sukhasan
- Padmasan



**Precautions:**

- Always breathe through nostrils unless specifically instructed.
- Practise in quite clean and pleasant room which is well ventilated and free from dust.
- Wear light and loose comfortable clothes.
- Must empty bowel and bladder before practising.
- Food to be taken only 30 minutes after practising of Pranayam.
- Pranayam should be practised after practising asan and before meditation.

21.2.2 Breathing Practice

Breathing lies at the centre of human existence. Therefore, it forms core of any yogic practice. Breathing facilitates oxygen supply to the brain as well as to the rest of the body. Learning to properly control your breath will actually help you to attain a strong body and a sharp mind. Learning to properly breathe will help you get the most out of your practice and give an increased sense of vitality and energy and help in maintaining mental focus throughout the day. So, first let's learn about breathing:

There are four types of breathing. They are -

Natural/ Normal breathing

Natural breathing is basically breath awareness. It is the starting point of working with the breath. It allows us to understand how we are breathing and our breathing patterns. It is relaxing, soothing and can be practised at any time. It is the basic starting point of meditation.

Abdominal Breathing

This type of breathing is associated with the movement of diaphragm and the outer wall of the abdomen. This form of breathing draws in the greatest amount of air at the least muscular effort. In this, during inhalation abdomen rises due to downward movement of diaphragm and on exhalation it falls down due to upward movement of diaphragm.

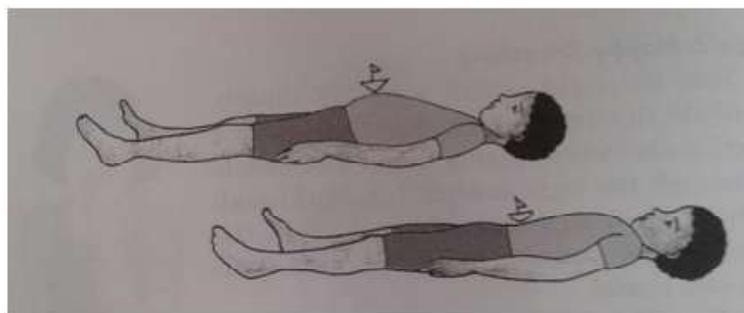


Fig.21.1: Abdominal Breathing



Thoracic Breathing

In this form of breathing, chest and rib's movements take place. It expends more energy than abdominal breathing for the same quantity of air exchange. It is often associated with physical exercise and exertion, as well as stress and tension.

Yogic Breathing

It combines all the above modes of breathing – abdominal and chest breathing into one harmonious movement. It is the ideal breathing that we are interested in developing. Only yogic breathing can give the maximum inhalation and exhalation. It may be practised at any time and is especially useful in stressful situations. Its purpose is to have a control over the breath, correct poor breathing habits and increase oxygen intakes. This is the best practice for gentle massage of abdominal and chest organs. This is a very useful practice to improve lung capacity.

Note: It can be practiced at any time. i.e., on empty stomach or after meals etc.



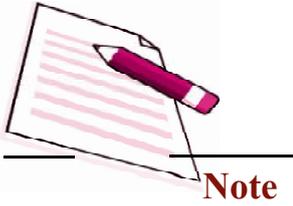
INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.2

- 1) Name the Asanas required for Pranayam over which one should have expertise.
- 2) Name the four breathing types of pre-Pranayam breathing practices.
- 3) Fill in the blanks with appropriate asans:
 - i) Spine should be for preparation of Pranayam.
 - ii) In thoracic breathing and movements take place.
 - iii) Yogic breathing combines all modes of breathing i.e and breathing in one harmonious movement.
- 4) Mark the following statements as 'True' or 'False'
 - i) Breathing can be done through mouth or nostril as per ease. ()
 - ii) Abdominal breathing is associated with the movement of diaphragm and outer wall of the abdomen. ()
 - iii) Yogic breathing can be practised at any time. ()



Note





21.3 COMPONENTS OF PRANAYAM

There are three components of Pranayam – Poorak, Rechak and Kumbhak. They are as follows-

- 1) **Poorak** or inhalation – It means complete inhaling (*swas*)
- 2) **Rechaka** or exhalation- It means complete exhaling (*praswas*)
- 3) **Kumbhak** – it means retention of breath. It is further divided into 2 parts.
 - i) Antar Kumbhak – Retention of breath after poorak
 - ii) Bahir Kumbhak – Retention of breath after rechak.
 - The most important component of Pranayam practice is Kumbhak or retention of breath.
 - Kumbhak should be practised under the supervision of expert.
 - Those who are suffering from high blood pressure, heart problems should not practise Kumbhak in their Pranayam practice.

21.3.1 Different Types of Pranayam

In various yogic scriptures, we find different types of Pranayama (here Kumbhak) but the common types seen in all of them are Suryabhedhi, Ujjayi, Bhramri, Bhastrika, Sheetali and Sheetkari. Nadi shodhan/ anulom- vilom is performed before doing all these Pranayam.

For easy understanding, here they are categorized under following headings. They are -

- 1) Balancing Pranayam — Nadi Shodhan Pranayam
- 2) Tranquilizing Pranayam — Bhramri, Ujjayi
- 3) Cooling Pranayam — Sheetli, Sheetkari
- 4) Heating Pranayam – Bhastrika, Suryabhedhi

Now, we will study these in brief. The method of doing all these, we will learn in practical manual.

21.3.2 Nadi Shodhan (Alternate Nostril Breathing)

Nadi shodhan literally means “channel clearing”. Though it is not a Pranayam yet it is considered as one of the basic types of Pranayam. The study of Pranayam must start with such basic procedure, so that it becomes easier to study and practise the different types of Pranayam. The Vayu cannot enter the Nadis if they are full of impurities. With this in mind, we study this Nadi Shodhan Pranayam first. It is a purifying Pranayam that alternates the blockage of each



nostril to channel air in a concentrated flow. It must be done before doing any pranayam.

Following steps instruct how to perform nadi shodhan:

- Sit down in any above mentioned Asan keeping spine erect.
- Now, use your right hand thumb to close the right side of your nose. Inhale slowly and deeply using the left nostril.
- Next, close the left nostril with fingers and exhale using the right one.
- In the same way, now with the left nostril still closed, inhale using the right nostril and exhale with the left one. This is one cycle.

You can continue doing this practice for around 10-15 cycles.



Fig.21.2: Nadi Shodhan or Alternate Nostril Breathing

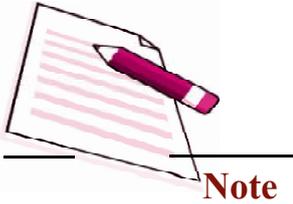
Benefits:

- Though simple in practice, yet it is very helpful in making the respiratory system improve functionally. It strengthens all the respiratory organs which are quite helpful in further advancement of the practice of Pranayam.
- It is a basic practice with no limitation except retention of breath. Alternate nostril breathing is a safe practice.
- It ensures that the whole body is nourished by an extra supply of oxygen. The brain centers are functioning at their optimum level.
- It clears pranic blockages and balances the nadis including Ida and Pingla Nadis, which leads Sushumna Nadi to flow properly resulting in spiritual awakening. Hence, it is known as balancing Pranayam.
- It balances both the hemispheres of the brain. On the physical level, it balances nervous system. It develops inner awareness and sense of deep understanding.
- **Awareness** – On the alternate nostril breathing and eyebrow centre.



Note



**Note**

21.3.3 Bhramari Pranayam – Humming Bee Breathing

In this type of Pranayam we exhale making a humming sound, the sound of ‘m’, as in the third letter of ‘aum’. It resembles the typical humming sound of bees. That’s why, it is called Bhramari Pranayam. Exhale slowly and do not strain. The sound should be smooth, even and controlled. It should be done under the guidance of expert.



Fig.21.3: Bhramari Pranayam

Contra-indications: Severe ear infection, ear ache, recent abdominal surgery.

If there is any feeling of faintness, dizziness, excessive perspiration or vomiting sensation, it should be stopped immediately.

Benefits –

- It is a tranquilizing Pranayama. So it is best suited for insomnia (sleeplessness) disorder.
- It relieves tension, anger and anxiety.
- It develops concentration and memory.
- It controls high blood pressure.
- It strengthens the throat and voice, useful for any throat problems.
- It is good for thyroid problems.

21.3.4 Sheetkari Pranayam

In Pranayam, we inhale through our mouth with the sound of ‘sheetkar’ which is produced on inhaling. Bring the teeth together lightly. Separate the lips so that teeth are exposed and then fold the tongue behind teeth to touch soft palate. Inhale slowly through the teeth. Close the mouth and exhale slowly through the nose. Keep the breaths slow and relaxed.



Contra-indications: People suffering from low blood pressure, respiratory disorder, excessive mucus, sensitive teeth, chronic constipation, hypothyroidism and hypoacidity should not practise this Pranayam. It should not be practised by the person having artificial teeth.

Benefits-

- This practice cools the body and mind.
- It induces muscular relaxations and mental tranquility.
- It helps to reduce blood pressure and acidity.
- It controls hunger or thirst, gives feeling of satisfaction.
- Helpful for nausea.
- It removes excessive heat, therefore, it is beneficial in summer.



Fig.21.4: Sheetkari Pranayam

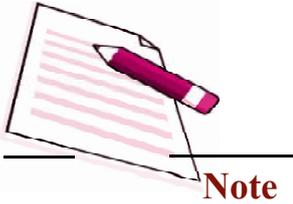
21.3.5 Sheetli Pranayama

As the name 'sheetal' suggests cool, calm and soothing; this Pranayam also helps us in achieving the same in practice. For this open the mouth and extend the tongue outside of the mouth, rolling it from the sides to form a tube. Inhale through the tube and exhale through the nose slowly and deeply.



Note



**Note****Fig.21.5: Sheetli Pranayam**

Contra-indications: -Same as Sheetkari Pranayam.

Benefits:

- It cools and reduces mental and emotional excitation. Other benefits are similar to Sheetkari Pranayam.

Both sheetli and sheetkari Pranayam are very useful in developing resistance against heat.

21.3.6 Ujjayi Pranayam (The Psychic/Victorious Breath)

Ujjayi means the ocean and this Pranayam is about mimicking the oceanic sound or the sound of the waves. In Ujjayi breathing, both inhalation and exhalation are through the nose. It is a diaphragmatic breath which fills the lower belly first, then the lower rib cage, the upper chest and throat. The opening between the vocal cords is contracted/ narrowed, creating a rushing or hissing sound. This audible breathing has been linked to ocean waves or snoring of a baby.

Contra-indications – People who are introvert by nature or suffering from fluid retention or low blood pressure should not practise this Pranayam.



Benefits:

- It soothes the nervous system and calms the mind.
- It is beneficial in insomnia and hyperthyroid problems.
- It relieves mental tensions, stress, and anxiety.
- It has tranquilizing effect.

Practice note: The contraction of throat/ vocal cord should not be too strong. It should be gentle throughout the practice.

21.3.7 Bhastrika Pranayam (Bellow's breath/ Heating Pranayam)

'Bhastrika' is a sanskrit word which means 'bellows'. This Pranayam resembles the blowing of bellows, hence it is called Bhastrika Pranayam. It is an excellent breathing exercise which we can practise slowly or fast as per our convenience. Basically it is fast breathing. Take a deep breath through both nostrils and fill the lungs with air and then exhale with a hissing sound. Inhale deeply and exhale completely.

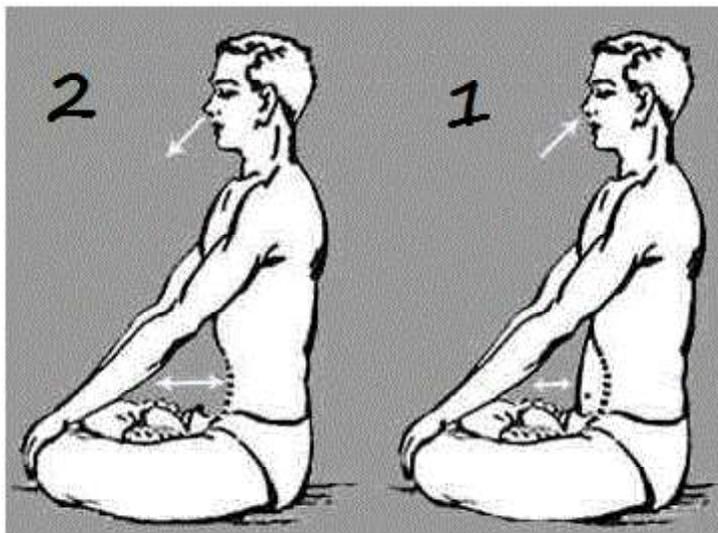


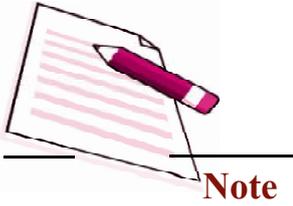
Fig.21.6: Bhastrika Pranayam

Contra-indications

High blood pressure, any heart problem, hernia, vertigo, hyper-acidity, ulcer, any recent abdominal surgery, or if there is too much heat in the body, stroke and hyperthyroidism.

Practice note: One should stop practice immediately if he/she feels - fainting, dizziness, excessive perspiration, excessive shaking of the body, vomiting etc.

**Note**



Benefits –

- Bhastrika purifies lungs, so it is very useful in asthma, tuberculosis and bronchitis.
- It corrects bad breathing habits.
- It speeds up the blood circulation.
- It optimizes digestive system by vigorous massage of the digestive organs.
- Increases the flow of prana throughout the whole pranic body.

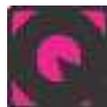
21.3.8 Suryabhedhi Pranayam (Right Nostril Breathing)

‘Surya’ means the sun and bheda means to pierce/awaken. In the body Pingala Nadi represents the energy of the sun or vital energy. Therefore, it means that we pierce or purify Pingala Nadi. In this Pranayam, we inhale and exhale through the right nostril.

Contra-indications - High blood pressure, heart disease, epilepsy, ulcer, acidity, hyperthyroidism, anxiety, headache or menstruation.

Benefits-

- Increases vital energy in the body.
- Heats the body.
- Stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and the left part of the brain.
- Eliminates Vata related trouble and
- Helps to balance Kapha.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 21.3

- 1) Fill in the blanks with appropriate words:
 - a) Three components of Pranayam are....., and
 - b) The most important component of Pranayam practice is.....
 - c) Tranquilizing Pranayam are..... and
 - d) is a purifying Pranayam.
 - e) Nadi shodhan strengthens all the which are quite helpful in further advancement of Pranayam practice.
 - f) On.....humming sound is produced in.....Pranayam.
 - g) Onsound of sheetkar is produced inPranayam.
 - h) Pranayam resembles the blowing of bellows.



- 2) Mark the following statements as 'True' or 'False'
- a) Sheetal Pranayam helps in cooling the body and mind. ()
- b) In Ujjayi breathing, both inhalation and exhalation are through the nose. ()
- c) People who are introvert by nature can do Ujjayi Pranayam. ()
- d) In Surya bhedi Pranayam we inhale through the left nostril and exhale through the right nostril. ()
- e) Just after abdominal surgery or hernia one should not practise Bhastrika Pranayam. ()



Note

21.4 HOW PRANAYAM PRACTICE LEADS TO MEDITATION AND SAMADHI?

In yogic meditation, breath training is essential preparation for deep meditation and Samadhi on the path to self-realization. When we try to meditate it is extremely common to have tension in the muscles and noisy thoughts in the mind. The nervous system is the mediator between the tense body and the noisy mind. One of the best ways to regulate that nervous system, and in turn the body and mind, is through the breath. Breath is the bridge between the body and the mind. Regulate breath, and the body and mind will follow. Patanjali in his text of yog Sutras mentioned the holding of breath as important practice in reaching up to Samadhi. So this is achieved through Pranayam practice. As we have studied pranayam is the way to control or regulate breath. With pranayam one can control or regulate pranic flow and achieve a healthy state of body and mind, and can attain higher states of awareness and self-realization.

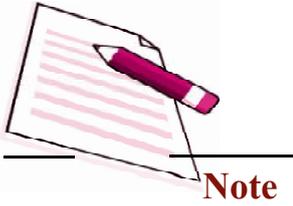


WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- The word Pranayam has two Sanskrit roots - 'Prana' and 'ayam'. "**Prana**" means vital energy and life force. "**Ayam**" means stretching, extension or expansion or control. Therefore, control of breath is Pranayam.
- Controlling Prana through Pranayam steadies the mind and cleanses the body
- **Pre- Pranayam Practices** are the processes of Pranayam concerned with the breathing. So, if it is done in a wrong manner, it may harm us. Therefore, some preparations are needed. They are- Asan and Breathing Practices.



Yogic Practices



- **Asan** - To successfully practise and attain the full benefits of Pranayam, it is necessary that it should be built on the solid foundation of a steady and comfortable Asan. Thus one should attain expertise in any one of these Asanas- Siddhasan, Sukhasan Padmasan.
- **Breathing Practice-** Breathing lies at the centre of human existence. Therefore, it forms core of any Yogic practice. There are four types of breathing- Natural, Abdominal, Thoracic and Yogic breathing.
- **Components of Pranayam-** There are three components of Pranayam – Poorak, Rechak and Kumbhak.
- There are different types of Pranayam told in yogic scripture and the common in all of them are Suryabhedhi, Ujjayi, Bhramri, Bhastrika, Sheetal and Sheetkari, Nadi shodhan/ anulom- vilom.
- Nadi shodhan literally means “channel clearing”. It is a basic and purifying Pranayam that alternates the blockage of each nostril to channel air in concentrated flow.
- Bhramari Pranayam- we exhale making a humming sound similar to humming sound of bees.
- Sheetkari Pranayam- In this we inhale through our mouth with the sound of ‘sheetkar’ which is produced on inhaling.
- Sheetal Pranayam- As the name ‘sheetal’ suggests cool, calm and soothing, this Pranayam also helps us to achieve the same in practice.
- Ujjayi Pranayam- This Pranayam is about mimicking the oceanic sound or the sound of the waves. Both inhalation and exhalation are through the nose.
- Bhastrika Pranayam- This Pranayam resembles the blowing of bellows, hence it is called Bhastrika Pranayam. Basically it is fast breathing,
- Suryabhedhi Pranayam- To pierce or purify Pingala Nadi is suryabhedhi Pranayam. In this Pranayam, we inhale and exhale through the right nostril.
- In yogic meditation, breath training is essential preparation for deep meditation and Samadhi on the path to self-realization. Breath is the bridge between the body and the mind. Regulate breath, the body and mind will follow accordingly. This is how Pranayam leads to meditation.



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

- 1) Describe the role and importance of pre-Pranayam practices.
- 2) How breath, prana and mind are influenced by each other. Explain.





ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

21.1

- 1) Pranayam has two root words - 'Prana' and 'ayama'. Prana means vital energy and life force. Ayama means stretching, restraining, extension or expansion.
- 2) a) Wrong
b) True
c) False

21.2

- 1) Sukhasan, Sidhasan, Padmasan
- 2) Natural breathing, Abdominal breathing, Thoracic breathing and Yogic breathing
- 3) i) Straight
ii) Chest and ribs
iii) Abdominal and thoracic
- 4) i) False
ii) True
iii) True

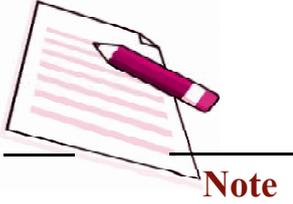
21.3

- 1) a) Poorak, Rechak and Kumbhak
b) Kumbhak
c) Bhramari and Ujjayi
d) Nadi shodhan
e) Respiratory organs
f) Exhaling, bhramari
g) Inhaling, sheetkari
h) Bhastrika
- 2) a) True
b) True



Note



Yogic Practices

- c) False
- d) False
- e) True

Suggested Reading and References

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