

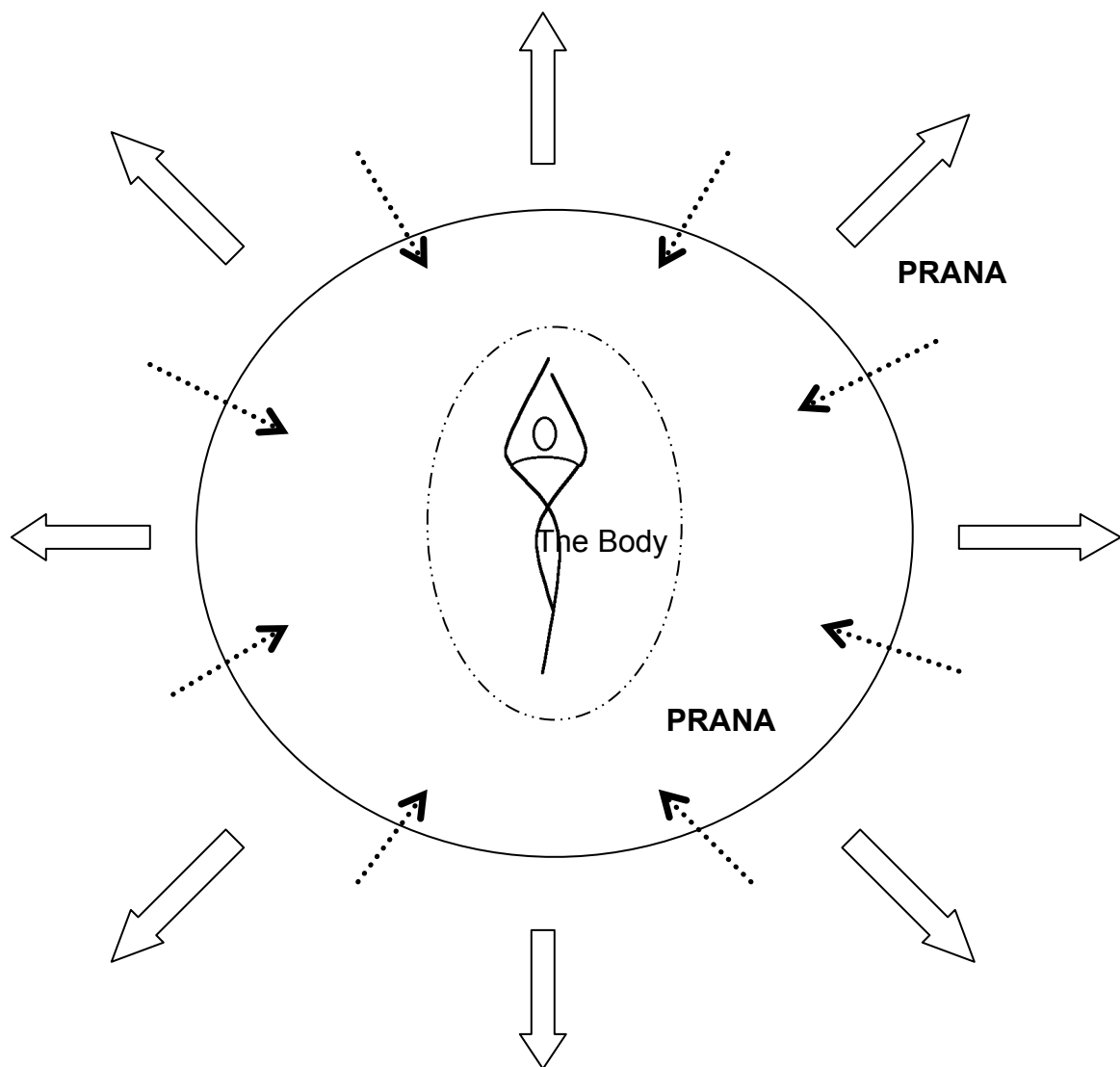
Pranayama and the Three Doshas

By Sally Miller



Prana is the all-pervading energy that gives life - it animates our bodies, the trees, the wind, and all living things. Prana is the vehicle upon which the divine travels within our bodies.

The body is limited (it has finite form), but the source of prana is infinite. Therefore we can use pranayama to renew and energize the body. Pranayama also helps to prevent pranic “leaks,” where-in we loose the prana that is meant to be stored within the body. We experience a leak in our prana when it feels like we take on the suffering of others, or try to change another person. This is often accompanied by feelings of fatigue or “unexplained” tiredness.



The pathways through which prana flows are called nadis. Blockages in these nadis cause physical pain, emotional affliction, or a myriad of what is commonly labeled as “suffering.”

Because the ways that each of us suffer are unique, it is often useful to further classify our suffering according to the three doshas. These doshas, or natural undulating forces that cause disturbance in the body, are called vata, pitta, and kapha. Pranayama is one of the most effective ways of managing the doshas, provided that we understand the nature of each one, and the qualities each exhibits as it expresses in the body/mind.

To further understand the effect of pranayama on the doshas, we will need to understand the 5 different kinds of prana. The all-pervasive Prana can be further classified into the 5 ways that it moves, throughout the cosmos and throughout our bodies. These 5 subtypes of Prana are called:



These 5 subtypes of prana are also referred to as the 5 vayus, or “winds.” They will thus be referred to as prana vayu, udana vayu, samana vayu, vyana vayu, and apana vayu. This is an important way of naming, because on its own, the term Prana will be used to denote the general, all-pervading Prana.

Pranayama for Calming Vata Dosha

Vata is naturally dry, light, cold, rough, subtle, and mobile. Vata is comprised of the ether (space) and air elements. The most common way for vata to go out of balance is from an increase in udana or vyana vayu. In general, we want to increase apana to balance vata. The following forms of pranayama help to soothe the nervousness, instability, dryness, worry, and fear, that often accompany an increase in vata dosha:

Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana)

Pranayama for Cooling Pitta Dosha

Pitta is naturally oily, sharp, hot, light, fleshy smelling, spreading, and liquid. Pitta is comprised of the fire and water elements. In general, we want to balance samana to balance pitta. The following forms of pranayama help to relax the perfectionism, excessive internal heat, skin conditions, diarrhea, self-criticism, anger and impatience that characterize an imbalance in pitta dosha:

Shitali Pranayama Left Nostril Breathing

Pranayama for Clarifying Kapha Dosha

Kapha is naturally heavy, slow, cool, oily, smooth, dense, soft, stable, and gross (obvious). Kapha is comprised of the water and earth elements. In general, we want to increase udana to balance kapha dosha. The following forms of pranayama invigorate the kapha-like stagnation that manifests as depression, coughs, colds, congestion, allergies, obesity, lethargy, and malaise:

Bhastrika
Kapalabhati
Right nostril Breathing

Pranayama for balancing all three Doshas

3 part Ujjayi Pranayama

For instructions on how to practice, reference the following texts:

1. [Ayurveda, The Science of Self-Healing](#) by Dr. Vasant Lad, Pages 114 - 125
2. [The Heart of Yoga](#), by T.K.V. Desikachar, Pages 53-70
3. [Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha](#), by Swami Satyananda Saraswati (the Bihar School of Yoga Publications), Pages 361 - 403