

## History and Etymology for *prana*

borrowed from Sanskrit *prāṇa*- "breath, exhalation, breath of life," derivative from the base of *prāṇiti* "(she/he) breathes, draws in breath," from *pra*- "before, forward" + *aniti* "(she/he) breathes"

Prana can be divided into small energetic parts called Vayu (wind). These panchavayu (5 winds) have subtle but distinct energetic qualities.

Our physiological functioning is affected by the flow of prana along it's five major currents: Prana, Apana, Vyana, Samana and Udana. This is much like the innerworkings of a very sophisticated engine. Prana brings in the fuel, Samana converts this fuel to energy, Vyana circulates the energy to the various work sites, Apana releases the waste materials or by-products of the conversion process, Udana governs the positive energy created in the process and determines the work that the engine is able to do. The physiological processes in the body (circulation, digestion, elimination, reproduction, immunity, etc) are governed by one or more vayus. By learning to work with the vayus we can get access to our physiology.

Prana vayu is responsible for intake. It moves downward and inward, providing the basic energy that drives us in life. It is primarily located in the head, lungs and heart. Imbalances in Prana flow can show up as anxiety, fear, anger (head); breathlessness, asthma, sleep apnea (lungs); heart palpitations or stroke (heart). Some of the ways to keep your Prana vayu in balance include:

- Emphasis on Inhalation (to encourage taking things in) · Prana Breath (IN: Pull the energy in through the sensory openings in the head (nose, eyes, ears, third eye); hold for a moment; EX: Release the energy through the third eye) · "Positive impressions" : contact with nature, visualizations, rituals · Sensory therapies: colors, sounds, aromas · Meditation generates prana in the mind · Wherever space and stillness is created, prana flows

Udana vayu is responsible for growth. It moves upward and is a result of other vayus working properly. It governs our ability to stand, our speech, effort, enthusiasm and will. It is concentrated

near the diaphragm and throat and is responsible for certain respiratory functions, speech and mental functioning (by supporting the blood movement to the brain). Imbalances in Udana vayu functioning include asthma, emphysema; stuttering, voice hoarseness; depression, poor memory, lack of creativity, direction or goals. To help with Udana functioning you can try:

Focus on Exhalation, particularly diaphragmatic breathing · Udana Breath (IN: Breathe in through the mouth, attention at the throat chakra EX: Chant OM) · Jalandhara Bandha-like movements · Chanting · Working with all other Vayus

Samana vayu is responsible for processing things and moves toward the center in a churning motion. It is concentrated around the navel. It is responsible for digestion on all levels, including the mind. It is associated with processes of digestion, absorption and assimilation. Imbalances in Samana function include metabolism issues, poor digestion, bloating, loss of appetite. To get Samana vayu back on track you might try: · Focus on Exhalation with abdominal contraction · Suspension of breath (hold after Exhale) · Progressive abdominal contraction (Zip-up) · Uddiyana Bandha-like practices · Samana breath (IN: Imagine pulling the energy in toward your belly EX: Contract the abdomen, imagine the energy becoming more concentrated; hold contraction for a moment.) · Kapalhati (to stimulate agni) · Quality food, fasting

Vyana vayu is responsible for distribution. It moves outward in a circular, pulsating motion. It is located in the heart and lungs and is involved in cardiac activity, circulation and voluntary nervous system. Imbalances may show up as poor circulation, blocked arteries, heart attack, edema; peripheral neuropathy, symptoms of MS. Practices that benefit Vyana vayu include:

· Focus on Inhalation and expansion · Retention of breath (hold after Inhale) · Vyana Breath (Place the hands on your chest. IN: Bring the arms out, expanding from the center out into the periphery, filling up the lungs; Hold 2 seconds; EX: Place the hands back on your chest. Keep your focus at the heart center) · Using asanas as prana pumps · Heart opening routines · Prayer, ritual · Any activities that give you joy, touch your heart

Apana vayu is responsible for elimination. It moves down and out, and also helps retain things in. It is primarily located in the lower abdomen and is associated with functions of elimination, reproduction and bone health (regulating the absorption and retaining of minerals). Imbalances in Apana flow can show up as constipation/diarrhea, IBS; menstrual problems, sexual issues; bone density issues. Some of the ways to keep your Apana vayu in balance include:

- Focus on Exhalation and Suspension of breath (hold after exhale) · Apana Breath (IN: Pull the energy into the belly EX: Direct the energy from the belly into the feet/ground; hold the air out for a moment. Attention at the root chakra) · Mula Bandha - like contraction of pelvic floor muscles · Nourishing foods, less junk

Prana, being the source of all movement, regulates all of our functions. It informs physical alignment, creates vitality, is the foundation of pranayama and roots our awareness in the moment.

It is linked to Nadi, Chakra and Marma.

Ida, Pingala and Sushumna are the 3 main Nadi. Ida and Pingala criss-cross up the spine and connect to opposite nostrils. Sushumna travels straight to the crown along the spine. There are 72,000 minor Nadi in the body.

Chakra is where Ida and Pingala cross through the Sushumna to the opposite side.

Marma include all the 7 primary Chakra and another 101 smaller 'chakra'. They are described in Ayurvedic texts as 'vulnerable points'. Marma are created where the 7 major Chakra connect with 1000's of minor Nadi which create these marma at their intersections.

Shakti is the Universal 'Prana'. Shakti can be described as the dense, Universal energy that affects our physical body and environment.

Kundalini is a type of Shakti energy coming up through Sushumna from the root of the spine. Locks at each Chakra stop Kundalini energy at each of these Chakra 'gateways' .

Prana comes from our food, the air around us and our environment (Nature). Sleep and meditation are also given as ways of accessing Prana. Prana travels through the Nadi to every cell in the body.

Awareness needs to be drawn to the subtle body (pranamaya kosha) to experience Prana. Pratyahara (the the fourth limb of Yoga) - withdrawal of the senses - is the most efficient tool to feel Prana.

Posture and maximising alignment is a huge tool in maximising Prana in the body.

If you stand up, energy flows up.  
If you sit down, energy flows down.

If you inhale, energy drawn up.  
If you exhale, energy drawn down.

If you inhale and stand up and exhale and sit down you' ll really feel Prana.

Bandha (Pranic lock) contains Prana in the torso and concentrates it in the 3 main Nadi and Chakra and Kundalini.

Mudra is a way to regulate and channel Prana into the Chakra.

Your quality of Prana has a huge effect on your focus and your concentration. Fluctuations and blockages in Prana has a connection with fluctuations and blockages of thoughts (chitta vrtti).

The reason for working on Prana is 'when our energy is flowing smoothly, so is our Mind' .