ANULOM - VILOM: Alternate nostrils Pranayam. Practitioners breathe in and out of alternating nostrils, pinching closed the nostril not being used.

BHRAMARI: Bumble Bee Pranayam. With fingers placed at strategic points on the head, practitioners constrict the throat and make the sound of a bumble-bee while inhaling.

BAHYA: "Suck In Stomach" Pranayam. Involves several precise steps, including sucking the stomach in and lifting the abdomen up while there is no air in the lungs.

BHASTRIKA: Inhale-Exhale Pranayam. Deep inhalations and exhalations using both nostrils.

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Breath as life force

Professor puts stock in ancient technique from India

Dr. Pradeep Deshpande, left and above, demonstrates Pranayam breathing techniques. Before doing these, people should talk with their physician first and then learn the techniques from a qualified instructor, he said.

Deshpande did a scientific study in fall 2005 with 19 professionals in the Louisville area including medical doctors. The participants trained in the Pranayam breathing technique with him and then practiced daily about 30 to 40 minutes at a time for three months on their own.

Pranayam techniques must be learned from an experienced practitioner, he said, because it is critical that they be performed correctly and safely. Breathing is controlled in several ways, including partially constricting the throat, alternating nostrils and focusing on exhaling while inhaling is passive and automatic.

In his study participants, Deshpande used Motorola Corp.'s Six Sigma method of quality measurements.

Deshpande found that 18 out of 19 participants in the study reported significant health benefits, and they have continued to do these exercises on a regular basis.

"Reducing health care costs is one of the major issues facing individuals and corporations today. How thrilling to discover that an ancient Indian technique (Pranayam), integrated with a modern American methodology (Six Sigma) could significantly reduce national health care costs if pursued diligently," said Deshpande.

He began practicing Pranayam daily two years ago and found that his health problems of hyperacidity, constipation and chronic sinusitis have practically disappeared. He also said his immune system and posture have improved significantly and he is better able to cope with stressful situations. He reported that he is saving about $100 per month on medications because he no longer needs to take them.

Deshpande recently retired after serving on the chemical engineering faculty at U of L for 30 years to spend more time on consulting activities related to Six Sigma and Pranayam.

The professor is a firm believer in the power of Pranayam, which is a set of breathing exercises that proponents claim can have enormous health benefits. Some of these are demonstrated in photos above.

Meditation calms the mind, and yoga strengthens the body, he said. But Pranayam goes beyond that to target internal organs and systems, from nasal systems and sinuses to urinary and gastrointestinal tracts, so that those areas function better.

NANCY LACEWELL | CORRESPONDENT
Send comments to nlacewel@bizjournals.com

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