Contrast Breathing

Instructor Training Manual

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Table of Contents

Introduction..... 4

Section 1: Understanding Contrast Breathing..... 4
1.1 Key Scientific terms……. 6
1.2 The Breathing Techniques..... 10

Section 2: Teaching Contrast Breathing.....12
2.1 Instructor Responsibilities..... 12
2.2 In-Person Session..... 13

Section 3: The Techniques 13

FAQ Section..... 17

Week by Week Protocols.....20

Introduction:

This training manual is designed to guide instructors in delivering the Contrast Breathing 12 Week Program. The program combines adapted ancient pranayama techniques with modern scientific understanding to create a powerful tool for enhancing physical and mental well-being. By learning to manipulate the breath, participants can balance their autonomic nervous system, reduce stress, improve focus, and cultivate greater emotional regulation.

The program consists of one in-person session and prerecorded audio tracks for participants to follow throughout the 12 weeks. As an instructor, your role is to ensure that participants understand the techniques, practice them safely, and have the support they need to make Contrast Breathing a consistent part of their daily routine.

Section 1: Understanding Contrast Breathing

1.1 The Science Behind Contrast Breathing

Contrast Breathing works by intentionally stimulating both the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) through specific breathing patterns. The SNS is responsible for the "fight or flight" response, while the PNS promotes relaxation and recovery. By alternating between practices that upregulate and downregulate these systems, Contrast Breathing may help restore balance in the autonomic nervous system.

What does it do?

1. Balancing the autonomic nervous system: Fast breathing techniques, such as Bhastrika Pranayama, (the Bellows Breath) can activate the sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the "fight or flight" response. On the other hand, slow breathing techniques, such as Bhramari (the Bees Breath) stimulate the vagus nerve and engage the

parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes relaxation and calmness. By alternating between fast and slow breathing, these protocols may help balance the autonomic nervous system, reducing the dominance of either the sympathetic or parasympathetic branches.

2. Improving stress resilience: Practicing fast breathing techniques can simulate a controlled stress response in the body, exposing individuals to short bursts of physiological arousal. Over time, this exposure may help improve stress resilience by teaching the nervous system to recover more quickly from stress-induced activation. As a result, individuals with a dysregulated nervous system may become better equipped to handle stressful situations without experiencing prolonged or excessive physiological arousal.

3. Enhancing emotional regulation: Slow breathing techniques have been shown to promote a sense of calmness and emotional balance. By incorporating slow breathing into the Contrast Breathing protocol, individuals with a dysregulated nervous system may learn to better regulate their emotional responses. This can be particularly helpful for those who experience intense emotions or have difficulty returning to a state of emotional equilibrium after a stressful event.

4. Increasing self-awareness and body-mind connection: The Contrast Breathing protocol requires individuals to focus on their breath and the sensations in their body. This heightened awareness can help individuals with a dysregulated nervous system become more attuned to their physiological and emotional states. By developing a stronger body-mind connection, they may be better able to recognize the early signs of nervous system dysregulation and take proactive steps to address it with their breathing.

Key Scientific Concepts Related to the Physiological Sigh:

1. Alveolar Inflation:

The physiological sigh is a natural breathing pattern that involves taking a first deep inhale, followed by a second shallow inhale in order to fill the lungs to capacity. Afterward, the breath is expelled through an open mouth.

Intuitive iterations of the physiological sigh are observed in humans roughly every five minutes as part of the natural breath rhythm. The primary purpose of the physiological sigh is to inflate the alveoli, the tiny air sacs in the lungs where gas exchange takes place. By taking a deep breath, the physiological sigh helps to prevent the collapse of alveoli and maintains lung compliance, ensuring efficient oxygen uptake and carbon dioxide removal. This process is particularly important in situations where breathing may be shallow or restricted, such as during periods of stress or while engaging in focused activities. The physiological sigh serves as a natural mechanism to maintain optimal lung function and promote effective gas exchange, contributing to overall respiratory health.

2. Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) Activation During Inhalation:

The physiological sigh begins with two deep inhalations, which can activate the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). The SNS is responsible for the "fight or flight" response and is associated with increased alertness, heart rate, and blood pressure. The activation of the SNS during the inhalation phase of the physiological sigh may contribute to a temporary increase in arousal and attention. This can be beneficial in situations that require quick responses or heightened awareness.

3. Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) Activation During Exhalation:

Following the deep inhalation, the physiological sigh involves a prolonged exhalation. This extended exhalation can stimulate the parasympathetic

nervous system (PNS), which is responsible for the "rest and digest" response. PNS activation is associated with a decrease in heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension, promoting a state of relaxation and calmness. The combination of a brief SNS activation during inhalation followed by a more prolonged PNS activation during exhalation may contribute to the overall balancing effect of the physiological sigh on the autonomic nervous system.

4. The Physiological Sigh and Mood States:

A recent study conducted by Dr. Andrew Huberman and his colleagues at Stanford University, compared the physiological sigh to an equal duration of mindfulness meditation. The results showed that participants who engaged in five minutes of the physiological sigh reported a greater decrease in negative mood states, such as stress and anxiety, and a more significant increase in positive mood states, such as calmness and relaxation, compared to those who practiced a comparable duration of mindfulness meditation.

Key Scientific Concepts Related to the Bee's Breath:

1. Vagus Nerve Stimulation and the Parasympathetic Nervous System:

The Bee's Breath, which involves a humming sound during exhalation, can stimulate the vagus nerve, the longest cranial nerve in the body. The vagus nerve is a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the "rest and digest" response. When the vagus nerve is stimulated, it can activate the parasympathetic nervous system, leading to a decrease in heart rate, blood pressure, and stress levels. This can promote a sense of relaxation and calmness, which is often reported by practitioners of the Bee's Breath.

2. Heart Rate Variability (HRV) and Breathing:

Heart Rate Variability (HRV) is a measure of the variation in time between consecutive heartbeats. Higher HRV is generally associated with better cardiovascular health and adaptability to stress. Research has shown that slow, deep breathing techniques, such as the Bee's Breath, can decrease heart rate and increase HRV, indicating a shift toward enhanced parasympathetic activity and a reduction in sympathetic activity.

3. The Role of Humming in the Bee's Breath:

The humming sound produced during the Bee's Breath is thought to play a role in its physiological effects. Humming can create vibrations in the airways, which may stimulate the production of nitric oxide (NO), a vasodilator that can improve blood flow and oxygenation. Additionally, humming may also stimulate the production of endogenous opioids, such as endorphins, which can contribute to feelings of well-being and pain relief.

4. Tragus Pressing and Vagus Nerve Stimulation:

The tragus is a small, cartilaginous projection located at the front of the external ear. Pressing on the tragus has been proposed as a simple method to stimulate the vagus nerve, as the auricular branch of the vagus nerve innervates the tragus. Some practitioners of the Bee's Breath may incorporate tragus pressing along with the humming sound to enhance the vagus nerve stimulation and its associated parasympathetic effects.

Key Scientific Concepts Related to Bhastrika Pranayama:

1. Respiratory Alkalosis:

Respiratory alkalosis occurs when rapid breathing, such as during Bhastrika pranayama, leads to a decrease in carbon dioxide (CO_2) levels

in the blood. CO_2 is an acidic compound, and when its levels drop, the blood becomes more alkaline, a condition known as alkalosis.

2. Respiratory Acidity:

The discomfort experienced when holding one's breath is primarily due to the accumulation of CO_2 in the blood, not a lack of oxygen. This is because the body is more sensitive to changes in CO_2 levels than to changes in oxygen levels. As CO_2 builds up in the blood during breath holding, it triggers the urge to breathe, which can cause discomfort and an overwhelming desire to inhale.

Holding your breath after hyperventilation can cause your blood pH to shift back to its normal, slightly acidic level from an alkaline state. When you hyperventilate, you exhale more CO_2, making your blood more alkaline. During the breath hold, your body continues producing CO_2, which builds up in your blood. This process continues until your blood pH returns to normal, triggering your urge to breathe.

3. Tetany:

Tetany is a set of symptoms that can occur during respiratory alkalosis, caused by the temporary imbalance of calcium ions in the body. The decreased CO_2 levels in the blood lead to a higher blood pH, which affects the way calcium ions bind to proteins. This can cause a range of sensations, including tingling in the extremities, muscle twitches, cramping, and lightheadedness. These symptoms are generally harmless and will subside once normal breathing is resumed, and blood pH returns to its usual level.

4. Hyperventilation and Inflammation:

A study conducted by Kox et al. in 2014 investigated the effects of hyperventilation followed by breath retention on the inflammatory response. The study found that individuals trained in the rapid breathing and breath

holding protocols were able to voluntarily suppress the innate immune response and attenuate the production of pro-inflammatory cytokines when exposed to an endotoxin. This suggests that controlled hyperventilation practices, such as those used in the Contrast Breathing program, may have potential anti-inflammatory effects.

5. Noradrenaline Release During Rapid Breathing:

Rapid breathing techniques can stimulate the sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for the "fight or flight" response. This stimulation leads to the release of noradrenaline, also known as norepinephrine, from the adrenal glands and nerve endings. Noradrenaline is a neurotransmitter and hormone that has several effects on the body, including:

- Increasing heart rate and blood pressure
- Raising blood sugar levels by promoting the breakdown of glucose
- Enhancing alertness, focus, and arousal
- Redistributing blood flow to the muscles, preparing the body for action

The increased release of noradrenaline during rapid breathing techniques like Bhastrika pranayama can lead to a state of heightened sympathetic activation. This may contribute to the feelings of increased energy, alertness, and focus reported by practitioners.

1.2 The Breathing Techniques

The three primary techniques in the Contrast Breathing Program are:

1. **Physiological Sigh**: To practice, take two quick inhales through the nose in order to fully inflate the lungs, follow with a long, smooth exhalation through the mouth, then pause before beginning the next breath cycle. Find a comfortable rhythm.

2. **Bhramari (The Bees Breath)**: Inhale deeply through the nose and, while exhaling slowly,hum like a bee. The sound should be even and create internal resonance.

a. **Bhramari with Tragus Pressure**: During exhalation and humming, lightly press your tragus to enhance the sound and resonance. Use your thumbs for this. Rest the arms when necessary.
b. **Bhramari with Tragus and Nose Pressure:** In addition to applying pressure to the tragus, participants will also partially close their nostrils by applying pressure with their middle fingers.

3. **Bhastrika:** Inhale deeply through the nose and allow a natural, passive exhalation through the mouth. These breath cycles should be quick but without strain. If a person has a difficult time breathing through the nose, breathing through the mouth, or alternating between mouth and nose breathing is permissible.

a. Breath Retention with Nearly Full Lungs:

After hyperventilation, In this exercise, individuals will draw a deep breath, filling the lungs to just short of their full capacity. At this point, they will hold their breath, maintaining the inhalation without straining

b. Breath Retention with Nearly Empty Lungs:

This breath retention occurs after hyperventilation as well. Participants will begin by inhaling fully to expand the lungs. Following this, they gently open their mouths, relax to release the breath, and pause momentarily when the lungs have just a small volume of air remaining.

Section 2: Teaching Contrast Breathing

2.1 Instructor Responsibilities

As a Contrast Breathing instructor, your responsibilities include:

1. Familiarizing yourself with the breathing techniques and their progression over the 12 weeks.

2. Conducting an in-person session to introduce participants to the program and demonstrate the techniques.

3. Creating pre-recorded audio tracks for each week of the program, guiding participants through the exercises.

4. Providing clear instructions and reminders about contraindications and safety precautions.

5. Being available to answer participants' questions and offer support throughout the program.

2.4 Safety and Contraindications

Participant safety is paramount. Regularly remind participants of the following contraindications and precautions:

Contraindications:

Uncontrolled asthma or COPD: These conditions can be exacerbated by changes in breathing.

Pregnancy: Rapid breathing exercises and breath retentions may not be safe during pregnancy.

History of epilepsy or psychotic spectrum disorders: Individuals with epilepsy, as well as those with psychiatric diagnoses that include psychosis, should not practice these exercises.

General safety guidelines:

- Practice in a quiet, safe environment.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.
- Practice on an empty stomach.
- Stay hydrated.
- Listen to your body and respect your limits.

2.3 Creating Audio Tracks

The prerecorded audio tracks are essential for guiding participants through their daily practice. Each track should include:

1. A brief introduction and reminder of safety precautions.
2. Guided instructions for the specific breathing exercises and their durations for that week.
3. Gentle reminders about proper technique, posture, and relaxation.
4. A closing statement encouraging participants to practice regularly

Ensure that the audio tracks follow the progression outlined in the program description and are of high audio quality. The program begins with shorter durations for each technique and gradually increases the time and intensity over the 12 weeks. Breath retention is introduced in Week 1 and progressively extended in duration. Bhramari is enhanced with the addition of tragus pressure and nose pressure in later weeks.

2.2 In-Person Session

The in-person session is crucial for setting participants up for success. During this session, you will:

1. Introduce the program and its objectives.
2. Discuss contraindications, safety precautions, and general guidelines for practice.
3. Explain the science behind Contrast Breathing and how it can benefit participants.
4. Demonstrate and guide participants through each of the four main techniques:

- Physiological Sigh
- Bhramari (Humming Bee Breath)
- Bhramari with Tragus Pressure
- Bhramari with Tragus and Nose Pressure
- Modified Bhastrika
- Breath Retention with Nearly Empty Lungs
- Breath Retention with Nearly Full Lungs

5. Provide participants with information on how to access the prerecorded audio tracks for each week of the program.

The techniques:

The in-person session is crucial for setting participants up for success. During this session, you will demonstrate and guide participants through each of the four main techniques:

1. Physiological Sigh:

- Instruction: "Take two quick, successive inhales through your nose, filling your lungs completely. Then, rapidly and fully through your mouth, allowing your body to relax. Repeat this pattern at a comfortable pace."

- Demonstration: Show the class how to perform the two quick inhales through the nose, followed by the long exhale through the mouth. Emphasize the relaxation that should accompany the exhale.

- Practice: Have the class practice the Physiological Sigh for a few minutes, ensuring they maintain the proper technique and pace.

2. Bhramari (The Bees Breath):

- Instruction: "Inhale deeply through both nostrils, filling your lungs. Then, exhale slowly through your nostrils while making a gentle humming sound, like a bee. Keep the sound consistent throughout the exhale."

- Demonstration: Show the class how to perform the Bhramari breath, emphasizing the deep inhalation and the controlled, buzzing exhalation.

- Practice: Have the class practice the Bhramari breath for a few minutes, ensuring they maintain the proper technique and sound.

3. Bhramari with Tragus and Nasal Pressure:

- Instruction: "Inhale deeply through both nostrils. As you exhale, apply gentle pressure to your tragus (the small, pointed part of your outer ear) and the sides of your nose using your fingers. Maintain the humming sound throughout the exhale."

- Demonstration: Show the class how to apply pressure to the tragus and sides of the nose while performing the Bhramari breath.

- Practice: Have the class practice the Bhramari breath with tragus and nasal pressure for a few minutes, ensuring they maintain the proper technique and pressure.

4. Modified Bhastrika (The Bellows Breath):

- Instruction: "Inhale vigorously through your nose, filling your lungs completely. Then, relax and allow for a passive exhale, letting the air flow out naturally. Repeat this pattern at a comfortable pace."

- Demonstration: Show the class how to perform the vigorous inhalation and passive exhalation of the modified Bhastrika breath.

- Practice: Have the class practice the modified Bhastrika breath for a few minutes, ensuring they maintain the proper technique and pace.

5. Breath Retention with Full Lungs:

- Instruction: "Inhale deeply, filling your lungs nearly to capacity. Hold your breath at this point, maintaining the inflation of your lungs, for a comfortable duration. When you need to breathe, exhale slowly and fully."
- Demonstration: Show the class how to perform the deep inhalation and breath retention with full lungs.
- Practice: Have the class practice breath retention with full lungs for a few rounds, ensuring they maintain the proper technique and only hold for a comfortable duration.

6. Breath Retention with Nearly Empty Lungs:

- Instruction: "Inhale deeply, then exhale about two-thirds of your breath. Hold your breath at this point, with minimal air in your lungs, for a comfortable duration. When you need to breathe, inhale slowly and fully."
- Demonstration: Show the class how to perform the partial exhalation and breath retention with nearly empty lungs.
- Practice: Have the class practice breath retention with nearly empty lungs for a few rounds, ensuring they maintain the proper technique and only hold for a comfortable duration.

Section 3: Supporting Participants

3.1: Encouraging Consistent Practice

Consistent practice is key to experiencing the full benefits of Contrast Breathing. Encourage participants to:

1. Set aside a regular time for practice each day.
2. Create a quiet, comfortable space for their practice.
3. Listen to the appropriate audio track each week and follow along.
4. Be patient and kind with themselves as they learn and grow.

Consider sending weekly emails to participants with reminders, tips, and encouragement.

FAQ Section:

Q: Why do I inhale through my nose and exhale through my mouth in the Physiological Sigh?

A: Inhaling through the nose has several benefits. The nose is designed to filter, warm, and humidify the air before it reaches the lungs. The turbinates in the nostrils help to swirl the air, allowing it to come into contact with the nasal mucosa, which produces nitric oxide. Nitric oxide is a vasodilator that helps to improve oxygenation by increasing blood flow to the lungs. Exhaling through an open mouth allows for a faster and more complete exhalation, which can lead to a deeper stimulation of the vagus nerve, promoting relaxation.

Q: Should I lay down or sit while practicing the Physiological Sigh?

A: Laying down can be nice, as it allows for a greater sense of relaxation. However, if you're feeling sleepy, you might drift off into sleep. In that case, choose a comfortable chair to sit in, ensuring that your spine is straight and your head is supported.

Q: Do I have to fill my lungs completely in Bhramari?

A: No, simply make your inhale as deep as possible without straining. Similarly, make the exhale as long as possible without forcing it. The goal is to find a comfortable and sustainable rhythm that allows you to focus on the humming sound and the sensations it creates.

Q: I have a hard time squeezing down with my belly on my exhale. Is that okay?

A: Yes, that's okay. Just do your best to make your exhale as long as possible, and it will still be effective. With practice, you may find that your abdominal muscles become more engaged, but there's no need to force it.

Q: Why do I press on the flaps near my ears (tragus) in Bhramari?

A: The tragus is a small, pointed protrusion located just outside the ear canal. It contains a branch of the vagus nerve, which is responsible for the "rest and digest" response in the body. By gently pressing on the tragus while humming, you can further stimulate the vagus nerve, enhancing the relaxation response.

Q: Why do I partially block my nostrils in Bhramari?

A: Partially blocking your nostrils slows down the airflow and increases the resonance of the humming sound. This can lead to a more powerful stimulation of the vagus nerve and other sensory receptors in the head and neck region, deepening the meditative aspect of the practice.

Q: What happens if my arms get tired during Bhramari?

A: It's okay to periodically rest your arms as long as you continue the breathing pattern. You can alternate between applying pressure to your tragus and nostrils and simply focusing on the humming sound and the sensations it creates.

Q: Why do I get tingly sensations during Bhastrika pranayama?

A: The rapid breathing in Bhastrika can lead to hyperventilation, which affects the levels of carbon dioxide (CO_2) in your blood. As CO_2 levels drop, the blood becomes more alkaline, which can impact calcium ion balance in the body. This can cause tingling sensations, muscle twitches, and a feeling of lightheadedness, known as tetany.

Q: Why do my hands sometimes clench or "claw" during Bhastrika?

A: The clawing of the hands, known as carpopedal spasm, is another symptom of tetany caused by the temporary imbalance of calcium ions in

the body during hyperventilation. This is a harmless and reversible effect that will subside once you return to normal breathing.

Q: Why do I get lightheaded during Bhastrika?

A: The lightheadedness experienced during Bhastrika is related to shifting blood flow patterns in the brain, which occur as a result of the changes in breathing. Research suggests that these shifts in blood flow can help quiet the default mode network (DMN) in the brain, which is often associated with mind-wandering and rumination.

Q: Is it okay to go slower during Bhastrika?

A: Yes, of course. Feel free to alternate between fast and slow breathing, finding a pace that is comfortable and sustainable for you. The goal is to challenge your breathing capacity without causing undue strain or discomfort.

Q: Why do I do an active inhale and passive exhale in modified Bhastrika?

A: The active inhale followed by a passive exhale helps to mitigate the intensity of tetany symptoms and makes it easier to practice Bhastrika for longer periods. The passive exhale allows for a more gradual release of air, reducing the likelihood of severe tetany.

Q: Can I breathe through my mouth during Bhastrika?

A: If breathing through the nose becomes uncomfortable, feel free to exhale through the mouth or alternate between nose and mouth breathing. The most important aspect is to maintain a steady rhythm and focus on the sensations created by the practice.

Q: What if I feel panicky during Bhastrika?

A: Remember that you are choosing to do this breathing practice, and you have control over the pace. If you feel panicky, slow down your breathing and remind yourself that you are in control. Panic attacks often feel involuntary, but in this case, you are consciously directing your breath. If the feeling persists, stop the practice and return to normal breathing.

Q: Can I practice these techniques if I have a respiratory condition like asthma?

A: If you have a respiratory condition, it's essential to consult with your healthcare provider before starting any new breathing practices. Some techniques, such as Bhastrika, may not be suitable for individuals with asthma or other respiratory issues. Always keep your inhaler nearby and stop the practice if you experience any discomfort or difficulty breathing.

Week by Week Protocols

Week 1:

Physiological sigh: Start with 1 minute.
Bhramari: 1 minute.
Bhastrika: 3 rounds of 10 breaths each. At the end of each round, hold the breath with nearly empty lungs for ten seconds

Week 2:

Physiological sigh: 2 minutes
Bhramari: 2 minutes
Bhastrika: Increase to 3 rounds of 15 breaths, with a fifteen second nearly empty lung breath retention at the end of each round.

Week 3:

Physiological sigh 3 minutes
Bhramari 3minutes
Bhastrika: Increase to 3 rounds of 20 breaths each with a fifteen second nearly empty breath hold at the end of each round.

Week 4:

Physiological sigh: 3 minutes.
Bhramari 3 minutes
Bhastrika: Practice 3 rounds of 25 breaths with a fifteen second nearly empty breath hold at the end of each round.

Week 5:

Physiological sigh: 3 minutes
Bhramari with tragus and nose pressure: One minute tragus pressure, one minute tragus and nose pressure, one minute normal
Bhastrika: Three rounds of 30 breaths. Introduce a 20-second breath retention after each round with lungs nearly empty. Focus on maintaining a comfortable and smooth flow.

Week 6:

Physiological sigh: 3 minutes
Bhramari with tragus and nose pressure Two minutes with tragus and nose pressure, one minute without
Bhastrika: Three rounds of 30 breaths Increase retention to 20 seconds at the bottom of the exhale in each round. Participants will be allowed to take a small sip of air if holding for twenty seconds is inaccessible.

Week 7:

Physiological sigh: Bhramari with tragus and nose pressure: Three minutes with tragus and nose pressure. Participants are allowed to rest arms when necessary. Bhastrika: Three rounds of thirty breaths. Increase retention to 25 seconds at the bottom of the exhale in each round, allowing sips of air if necessary.

Week 8:

Physiological sigh: 3 minutes
Bhramari: Three minutes of tragus and ear pressure. Rest when necessary
Bhastrika: Three rounds of thirty. Increase retention to 30 seconds at the bottom of the exhale in each round.

Week 9:

Physiological sigh: 4 minutes
Bhramari: 4 minutes with tragus and ear pressure
Bhastrika: Three rounds of thirty. Maintain 30 seconds at the bottom of the exhale in each round.

Week 10

Physiological sigh: 5 minutes
Bhramari with tragus and nose pressure: 5 min
Bhastrika: Three rounds of thirty 30. 30 second retention after each round at the bottom of the exhale and 15 seconds at the top of the inhale.

Week 11:

Physiological sigh 5 min
Bhramari with tragus and nose pressure: 5 min
Bhastrika: Three rounds of thirty 30. 30 second retention after each round at the bottom of the exhale and 20 seconds at the top of the inhale.

Week 12:

Physiological sigh 5 min
Bhramari with tragus and nose pressure: 5 min
Bhastrika: Three rounds of thirty 30 large circular breaths, 30 second retention after each round at the bottom of the exhale