Kapalabhati: Skull-Shining Breath

Before you practice

These guides are general fitness and mindfulness content written by BLKMAT. They are not medical advice, therapy, or treatment, and they are not a substitute for a qualified yoga teacher or health professional.

- Check with a doctor or physical therapist before starting a new exercise routine, especially if you are pregnant, recovering from an injury or surgery, or managing a heart, blood-pressure, joint, or balance condition.
- Move within a comfortable range. Mild stretching sensation is fine; sharp, pinching, or electric pain, numbness, or dizziness means stop.
- If you feel faint, dizzy, short of breath, or unwell at any point, stop and rest. Get medical help if it doesn't pass quickly.
- Breathe through your nose if you can, and never hold your breath to force a pose.
- Use a wall, chair, folded blanket, or pillow for support whenever it helps. Props are not "cheating."
- Practice on a dry mat on a flat, non-slip floor. BLKMAT mats have a natural rubber base, which contains latex.

Zodiac and chakra themes in these guides are cultural and creative frameworks for choosing what to practice and what to pay attention to. They are not scientific or health claims.

A BLKMAT guide to Kapalabhati, the skull-shining breath. Two or three short rounds, seated, on an empty stomach. Read the safety note first.

What it is

Kapalabhati reverses the usual emphasis: the exhale is active and quick, driven by a sharp pull of the belly, and the inhale is passive — it happens on its own as the belly releases. The name means “skull shining”; tradition says it leaves the head feeling clear and bright.

When to use it

In the morning, on an empty stomach, to wake up. Before practice, as a warm-up for the breath. Never late at night — it is stimulating.

How to practice

1. Sit tall with both hands on your knees. Take a deep breath in, and let it out.
2. Snap the belly in sharply, as if startled — a short burst of air leaves through the nose.
3. Let the belly release; the inhale happens by itself. Do not pull air in.
4. Repeat the pump without pausing: exhale, release, exhale, release. The torso stays still; only the belly moves.
5. After one round, stop and breathe normally for 30–60 seconds. Notice how you feel, then decide whether to do another round.

Timing and counts

Pace	Round	Rounds
About 1 pump per second to start; faster only when skilled	20–30 pumps	2–3, resting in between

Why people practice it

It is a cleansing technique (a kriya) as much as a pranayama: the repeated belly pumps are traditionally used to clear the nasal passages and shake off morning sluggishness. It also teaches the difference between breathing with the belly and breathing with the chest — quickly.

Take care

- **Do not practice** if you are pregnant, have high blood pressure, a heart condition, a hernia, recent abdominal surgery, epilepsy, vertigo, or an eye condition such as glaucoma. Traditional guidance also says to skip it during menstruation.
- Learn Dirga and Ujjayi first. Kapalabhati is not a first technique.
- Stop immediately if you feel dizzy, light-headed, or tingly. Those are signs to rest, not to push through.
- Practice on an empty stomach.

Related glossary terms

Kapalabhati

Part of the Breathing Techniques category in the Practice Library.

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