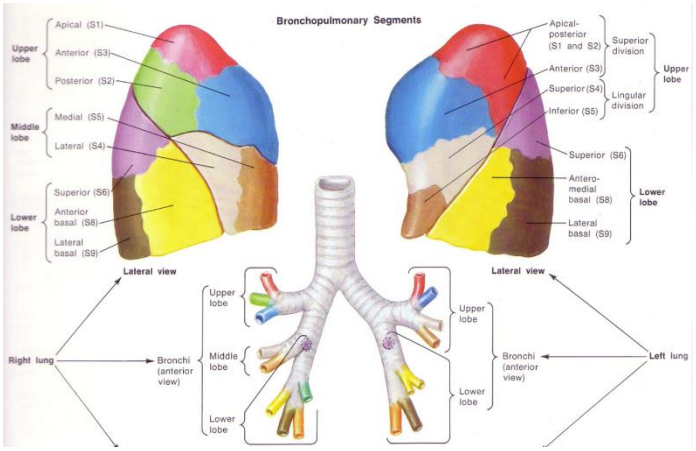
Iyengar Yoga: Lungs & breathing difficulties

Overview:
The lungs are the primary organs of the respiratory system. Lungs (respiratory system) extract oxygen from the atmosphere and transfer it into the blood & vice versa
lungs play a big role in the maintenance and smooth functioning of other organs as well.

Lungs have multiple sides:
Front Side - Chest Facing
Back Side - Spine Facing
Right Side - Right Rib Facing
Left Side - Left Rib Facing
Lower Base - Pelvis & Diaphragm Facing
Upper Base - Inner Throat Facing
Inner Core - The Chambers
The Alveoli
The Branches And Everything Else In Between (See Diagram below).

Reference image showings all parts of the Lungs:



Health of the lungs:
For optimal functioning, focus should be on opening all the sides of lungs as described. All sides need to function simultaneously & in correlation with the other. The balance between front & back, left & right, inner & outer, is the root of this article. Through various examples & adjustments in yoga asanas, the same has been detailed.

Identifying the problem

We will examine various shortcomings in the functionality of a patient's lungs suffering from shortness of breath, wheezing, allergic reactions, or similar symptoms.

A patient with weak lungs will perpetually be exhausted and tired. Such a person will wake up in the morning often feeling more tired than the night before. Reason? His lungs were drawing more effort to breathe than what it would give back to the system as energy. His breathing was laborious, heavily muscular (chest muscles involved in breathing) & skeletal (ribs were made to do the breathing) driven rather than organic (diaphragm). Naturally ribs, sternum & muscles were much more heavy, hence leading to exhaustion.

The lungs on the other hand were functioning less than optimum. Generally speaking, the lungs may be shrunk at some of the sides. Be it front, back, left, right. The same can be diagnosed by keenly observing the chest movement while a person breathes. The short side(s) become obvious & apparent.
His ribs may hurt, to a level that he would want to give up breathing (acute scenario). He can also feel choked at the base of his throat, wheezing sound can apparently be heard.

"I am an Iyengar Yoga practitioner for 18 years as of 2020, at the age of 34. Physically I come across as a strong man displaying no illness whatsoever. But some of my nights have been nightmares.
I still face these symptoms, although greatly reduced.
This article is a research on myself, through the knowledge empowered by Guruji BKS Iyengar, Gitaji, Prashantji, Sunitaji & Abhijata S. Iyengar & all wonderful teachers at RIMYI, Pune. For many years I struggled to get answers to this problem. I would have night asthma attacks, wheezing sound so loud anybody could hear from a distance and almost zero breath.
At some point, I would feel like my heart will fail. However, knowledge has shone brighter & I now call my problem solved."

Recommended Asanas

1. Uttanasana:

Uttanasana has been given here using a resistance on the frontal chest, the sternum region. This is to channelize the breath energy from the front chest to the back chest and the back of lungs region. Back lungs are usually underutilized & by keeping a dam like resistance under the sternum allows to move the breath to the back regions of lungs, generating life. This action creates convexity in different parts of the spine through different variations. Resistance tends to be like a "*DAM*" which resists in a manner that the back lungs area is flooded with breath just like water in a reservoir.

Props:
Bolsters
Blankets
Yoga mat
Tressle or stool with similar height and length
Weights with extension
Bricks

Variation 1a: Sternum Rested on horizontal trestle


Steps:
Stand of bricks or similar prop to bring pelvis the same height as the trestle.
Place a blanket on the tressler. Bend forward resting the sternum on the blanket.
Sternum is well rested and is also able to expand horizontally. Stay in this asana and breathe normally for some time.

How & why it works:
Increase the capacity of the lower, middle and upper lobes of back lungs by channelizing breath to the back lungs region; convexity of spine is created - gives rest to frontal lungs. Allows horizontal movement breath so it can reach to the side of lungs. Wheezing & shortness of breath can be immediately arrested by placing different regions of sternum (upper, middle, lower-middle) in this asana.

Variation 1b
If standing is tiresome or tressle is not available, the same can be done by placing knees on a bolster & bending forward on a smaller stool bringing similar action as variation 1a.

Variation 1c: Sternum rested on vertical tressle


Steps:
Keep the tressler vertically in front. Place a vertical folded blanket on the tessler. Rest the entire frontal torso on the tressle, from the lower abdomen till the head. Place the hands on the bricks kept right under the arms. Face either side alternatively.

How & why it works:

Enhances breathing capacity of the back lungs from the lower till the upper simultaneously.. Upper back lungs are rapidly charged with the spreading action of the shoulder blade. There is a vertical movement of the breathing pattern which makes breath penetrate to the lower lungs much effectively. The front sternum is not squeezed but controlled & rested which is much needed for its relaxation & recovery.

Variation 1c: Sternum rested on horizontal tressle using weights

Steps:
Stand of bricks or similar prop to bring pelvis the same height as the trestle.
Place a bolster or pillow on the tressler. Bend forward resting the frontal chest on the bolster. Hold the extensions of the weight such that the weight is on the floor while the extensions are fully tensed. Stay in this asana and breathe normally for some time.

How it works:
The weight resists the upper shoulder blade movement while breathing which helps in deeper penetration of the inhalation; inhalation-exhalation movement is controlled by the weights which give full expansion of the back lungs.

*Lying down in savasana intermittently between asanas is important for recovery from exhaustion or tiredness. Patients may get tired even doing these asanas. Hence, make him lie down in any savasana variation to rest the muscles & recover faster.

2. Adho Mukha Svanasana

Resting of the is emphasized here as that allows the direction of inhalation moving toward the pelvis. Spinal convexity allows expansion & irrigation of back lungs, however the action is more active as now the frontal chest has no support under. This asana variation has prime focus on the lower base of the lungs.

Props:
Yoga mat
Table or chair to place hands
Bricks
Footrest
Rope

Variation 2a: With rope traction

Steps:
Place the wrist on the table edge while fingers are pointing downward. Keep shoulder width distance between the palms. Adjust the bricks under so the forehead is comfortably placed on it. Legs are kept diagonal & firm. The heel is pressed over a foot rest. Adjust the rope in the pelvic area and the helper pulls back. Same can be done without rope if no helper is available. Rest and breathe normally.

How & why it works:
By inverting the palms, it helps to spread the shoulder blades horizontally & expose the upper lung area under it, spreading them horizontally. This convexity of spine is more natural as there is no support under the sternum. By resting the head, there is a flow of breath that goes towards the pelvic region expanding the lower lungs much effectively. The rope gives the patient a lot of restful support enabling him to stay longer in the asana.

Variation 2b: Without rope traction

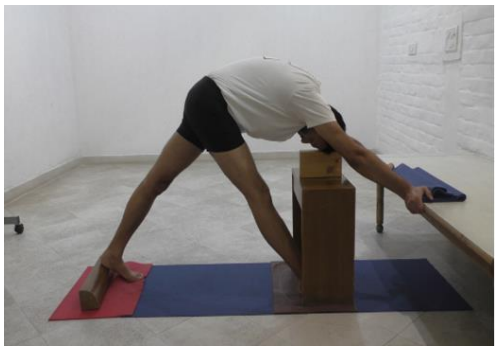
Steps:
Place the wrist on the table edge while fingers are pointing downward. Keep shoulder width distance between the palms. Adjust the bricks under so the forehead is comfortably placed on it. Legs are kept diagonal & firm. The heel is pressed over a foot rest. Rest and breathe normally.

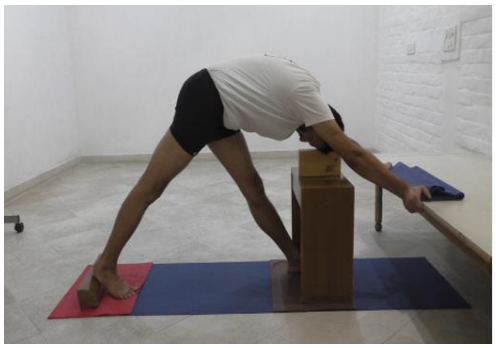
How & why it works:
By inverting the palms, it helps to spread the shoulder blades horizontally & expose the upper lung area under it, spreading them horizontally. This convexity of spine is more natural as there is no support under the sternum. By resting the head, there is a flow of breath that goes towards the pelvic region expanding the lower lungs much effectively.

3. Parsvottan:

Props:
Bricks
Table or chair
Foot rest

Yoga mat





Steps To Perform:
Inverting your palms, place hands on the table. Place another table and brick to create height for forehead and rest. (Height according to the patient). Take on leg forward & one leg back, bend forward & rest the head on support. Tighten each leg one at a time. Stay for some time and breathe normally.

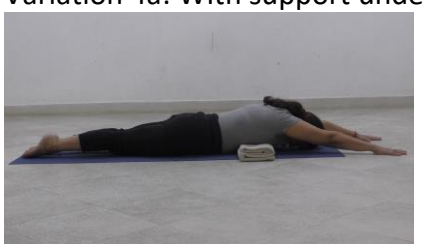
How & why it works:
Alternate tightening of the legs helps to give rest to the person as it is less demanding as compared to tightening both legs simultaneously. With the variation of inverting the palms helps spread the shoulder blades horizontally & expose the upper lungs under it, spreading them horizontally. Spine is convex, back lungs are expanded & irrigated by breath. Inhalation moves towards the pelvis region, hence opening the lower lungs effectively.

*A patient, exhausted by breath, can be made to tighten the legs alternatively. This is a relief to his lungs which are currently incapable of spending more energy. Hence alternatively stimulating the thigh muscles sparks energy flow in & from the legs in a much subtler way.

4. Prone Tadasana:

Props:
Yoga mat
Blankets
Bolster
Wall
Bricks

Variation 4a: WIth support under



Steps:

Lay prone (face down) on the mat with a blanket under the sternum region. Head rested on a folded blanket. The width & placement plays an important role. Alternate the position & thickness of the blanket for varied results.

How & why it works:
DIfferent parts of the front chest when pressed against the blanket rests the area of the frontal lungs & opens the area opposite, that is, the back lungs. The breath is rested. The patient recovers from breathing fatigue. This can also be done in between asanas as a recovery asana.

Variation 4b: With support under and palms pressed against wall
Lay prone (face down) on the mat with a blanket or bolster under the torso, from the lower navel to the face. Head rested on a folded blanket. Palms are pressed against the wall.

How & why it works:
The frontal chest, the frontal lungs are full rested. Palms pressed on the wall make the inhalation breath travel vertically towards the lower organs. This irrigation is very deep penetrating & can be felt instantly in the lower lungs.

Important Note :Make sure not to push the student/patient as he is already exhausted. Hence, give him support & break down the asana in smaller or more doable asanas & arrangements.
With the kind blessing of Guruji, Geetaji, Prashantji, Sunithaji. And all the kind, immensely learned teachers of RIMYI, Pune.