

Following is the full text of yoga teacher Jim Kambeitz's talk titled "Pranayama: Extend Your Life by Extending Your Breath" at TEDxBismarck conference.

Jim Kambeitz - TEDx Talk TRANSCRIPT

What if I told you doctors have discovered a miraculous medicine that would allow you to catch yourself in times of [stress](#), sadness, anger, [anxiety](#) or pain, and within moments, regain control of yourself, bring yourself together, stopping the suffering right in its tracks, all-natural, laboratory-tested and no side effects?

You'd probably say, "Hmm... how much is it?"

Free.

Most of you'd probably think, "*Hey, sign me up.*"

And the more inquisitive might ask: "*Can it even help insomnia, digestive problems, arthritis pain, lower my blood pressure?*"

Yes.

You're probably thinking, "*It sounds too good to be true. Let me get this straight. So, it will make every aspect of my life better, and I don't have to do anything but take this pill?*"

Wait just a minute. I didn't say you didn't have to do anything. You have to do one thing every day.

"But you said it was just a medicine."

It is, but it's not in a pill form. This medicine is yoga, breath control, aka *pranayama* in Sanskrit.

The gurus believe if there is any physical, mental or spiritual disease that yoga cannot cure, than it cannot be cured. It is that powerful.

And do not fear: it is a proven science, not a religion, and anyone can do it, “except for,” as my teacher in India always says, “a lazy person.”

Now, at this point in the hypothetical situation, I would predict, if you are anything like me, you’re thinking, *“You mean I have to do yoga? I can’t just take a pill?”*

Well, that is exactly what I thought until one day, when I was hopelessly desperate and no longer able to stand on my left leg. I was convinced by the Western doctors who had done my knee surgeries ten years earlier, that the only way I could walk into old age was to get a complete knee replacement.

Now, I didn’t feel this way at the time, but I was sure lucky to be so desperate because changing ourselves is so difficult, and there are only two ways we can really do it.

One: be miserably desperate, have no other options, and two: being inspired.

So, as I look out in the audience today, I sincerely hope that many of you are miserably desperate and the other lot of you are inspired by some part of this story to consider adding [meditation](#), yoga, conscious breathing into your daily routine.

Now, I didn’t always feel this way. Here’s me in high school: football player, wrestler, 20 pounds heavier, and if you would have told me that in another 20 years, I’d be spending most of my time dreaming about my next trip to India and doing yoga every single day, I’d have said you were completely crazy.

SO HOW DID IT COME TO THIS?

Well, let's rewind the tape eight years, living in Poland, slowly losing my ability to walk, when I went to see a Ukrainian physical therapist who'd studied in India. He pressed on some points on my knee to get the right muscles and tendons to relax, thoroughly examined it, and, to my surprise, for the first time in a month, I was able to stand on my knee.

He said, *"There's nothing wrong with your knee except that you are hurting your knee. You are walking wrong, eating wrong, standing wrong. Your body is out of alignment. And if you want to walk, you need to start doing yoga every single day — lengthening your hamstrings, imprinting the proper alignment onto your body with this practice — right away."*

Thinking about what he said on the tram home, I was really confused. Because this went against all of my core beliefs about my health.

I'd been convinced that because my parents had knee problems, then I would have knee problems. That every day a person gets older, their health just gets worse and worse.

That my knee was destroyed from years of sports and that the only way that I could ever heal was to cut out my knee, and I was seriously planning that.

To accept that I was unknowingly injuring myself would mean that I would have to be responsible for my own healing. And if I couldn't walk in the future, it was only because I was lazy.

For the next two days, grumpy but scared, I did yoga first thing every morning, imprinting that proper muscle alignment on my body, and I could walk.

Woah! First time in a month, I'm walking.

So the third day: *“Hey, I’m healed. This is great. This yoga was awesome, two days, healed me. I’m done.”*

I started walking, and I was great, saying, *“Yeah, it’s really true. I don’t need to do this.”*

By the end of the day, knee started locking up, my old muscle memory returned, and I couldn’t walk. At this moment, I was livid. I said, *“You mean I have to do yoga every day if I want to walk? Aaagh.”*

Not happy, but desperate, I did my yoga. I started out with sun salutations, about 30 minutes of Vinyasa yoga, and that’s just flow — just means you flow with every breath.

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After a few weeks, I wanted more; I needed more. So I started doing half of the Ashtanga yoga primary series. Ashtanga yoga is a really beautiful form of yoga where you turn your whole body into a breathing machine, and you do that for about 90 minutes through a series of poses, and at the end, you are in bliss for the rest of the day.

Nobody, not even the taxi drivers in Warsaw, can make you angry.

And at that point, I had to admit the Ukrainian was right. And that was when I got inspired because not only did my knee heal, but all these other changes started happening.

I was never a morning person, but all of a sudden, I’m waking up at the crack of noon to do my yoga. My asthma, that I’d struggled with all my life, completely disappeared. My stomach pain — gone. I had chronic stomach pain, non-stop; I was always walking around like this. And most baffling of all, I remembered where I put my keys.

So I started studying everything I could about yoga, and I wanted to know more, which led me to all the deeper things behind yoga. I needed more than just the physical practice. So, we call the positions in yoga *asanas*.

And I had to go beyond the asanas. Before, you see, I used to think yoga was just these physical poses that you'd get in and hold your breath in for a while. And then I realized, wow, the rest of yoga has all these subtle breathing practices.

And the only reason why we do the physical yoga is in order to heal our bodies first because we can't sit in meditation and bathe in the bliss of life if all we're thinking about is how bad our back is killing us.

I started discovering all these practices, and it was so exciting. I was like a kid in a candy store, just blown away by the simplicity.

Then you come to the Sanskrit language, and it's so beautiful too; it's so logical and so powerful. Let's take the word *pranayama* for example. It describes a lot of different breathing practices, and I feel it really sums up the essence of yoga and why we do this.

So let's dissect it. First you have *prana*, which means *the life force*. Literally, it's in the air we breathe; it's all around us.

And then we have *ayama*, which is *lengthening*. So literally, "life lengthening through breathing." This ancient yoga practice, it's also really proven in science if you look at what breathing does.

When you slow your respiratory rate, it kicks in the parasympathetic nervous system, right? Lowering your blood pressure, calming your body down, relieving stress.

Breathing fast, on the other hand, kicks in your fight-or-flight sympathetic nervous reaction. It makes your heart race, mind race out of control.

Want to live a long life? Here's a key: it's a chart of the average breaths per minute and then how long they live.

Mouse: breathing average of 130 breaths — breathe very, very fast — and they only live to be one to three years old.

Next, we have the dog: dog breathes about 30 breaths on average per minute; they live 10 to 20 years old.

Let's jump to the chimpanzee: they breathe about 14 breaths per minute, little better, and they live 40 years.

The horse: they breathe about 12 on average, while at rest, and they live to be 50 years; they can't — I wouldn't want to ride that one.

And the human, let's just average it at nine. Well, a healthy human, anywhere from 6 to 12. An unhealthy human, maybe 12 to 24 breaths per minute, and that unhealthy human will probably live less long.

So, now we have the whale: whale breathes 6 breaths a minute, lives to be 100.

Obviously, there are exceptions, but the tendency is pretty clear. All right. So there you have it.

I shared this information, actually, with a colleague at work — he's in his 60s — and he said, *"Where were you when I was younger? You should have told me this then. Come on."*

And that is exactly what my wife and I thought: *"Why isn't this taught in every school from preschool until university."*

So my wife and I decided, *"Hey, we're not going to wait for school. We're going to teach our baby from the moment of conception."*

Pregnant — we're off to India, doing as much yoga, chanting and meditation as we possibly can. Then once our daughter was born, we held her on our chest, and we lay down and breathe deep as much as we could, super deep, because we wanted to force her to imitate us, and she would; she'd sync up her breath with ours after we'd done it long enough.

ALSO READ: Barack Obama Inspirational Speech (Transcript)

And if she started crying, well then, we'd breathe really loud and exaggerate our breath in her ear, and that calming sound would calm her down.

And so it would be something like this: *(Breathing loudly in and out)*

And that sound is the same sound you hear in Ashtanga yoga, very deep, loud sounds like this: *(Breathing loudly in and out)*

So the whole time you're doing yoga for an hour-and-a-half, you are physically calming yourself down. It's like taking tranquilizers, but yet you have the energy of coffee. Totally amazing.

So when our baby would cry and the breathing wouldn't immediately help, she wouldn't catch on, we couldn't snap her out of her crying, well, at least it calmed us down. And eventually, that had a calming effect on her.

Think about our normal reaction when a baby cries: breath stopped, brain not getting oxygen, *"What can I do to make this baby stop crying?"*

So, holding our breath; body's lacking oxygen; telling brain, *"We need oxygen"*; brain starts panicking. It's so hard to stop.

When our daughter was a little older and started crying, we would say, *"Breathe."*

As soon as she started crying, we'd get eye contact, get right in her face, and say, "Breathe."

And then we'd do it with her: smiling and breathing. And she'd normally jump right on and breathe super loud. If she's still crying, and we can't stop her, then we grab her and hold her. Just hug her and breathe with her until she breathes and calms herself down.

And let's take a look at this breathing.

(Video clip: Jim Kambeitz: Lily, what's the matter? Breathe, honey. Yeah, breathe.

(Both breathing deeply)

Yeah. It's okay, don't cry, Lily).

So that's what it looks like; she literally went, in about seven seconds, from screaming like crazy to deep breathes, and she started smiling. Totally amazing.

So my wife and I, we're thinking, "Hey, this is really great." But then we hit terrible twos or terrific twos, depending on who you are.

And in the terrific twos, we have tantrums, and tantrums will force you to learn yoga in a whole new way.

As my friend in Poland said, "Yoga is not for the mat. You have to practice it while changing a diaper with one arm and holding a second baby with the other on one leg while doing your taxes."

But what do you do? Child is tantruming; you're trying to get her to breathe, it won't start breathing — like a computer, kind of frozen?

So, the next thing we need to practice is detached observation without judgment. Child starts crying, make sure they're safe, detach and leave the room. If they resume tantruming, stay calm; eventually it will go away.

A tantrum, like all our bad emotions and tough situations in our life, they will leave our bodies, with time. And research has shown that you cannot have an emotion in your body any longer than seven seconds unless you fuel it.

Remember, anxiety is in our mind, and our mind has to give us the fuel to keep it going.

Here's a formula for transforming uncomfortable emotions or experiences, with our breath.

First, we recognize what we're suffering from: "Oh, anger, frustration."

Next, we start breathing very deeply. And next, we release it and keep breathing. It will go away.

So, speaking of going away, I'm going to leave you with one last fact my scuba-diving teacher taught me years ago: *"It is biologically impossible to have an anxiety or panic attack when you are breathing fully, deeply, slowly."*

You can't do it. Think of how many billions of dollars are spent each year in anxiety, arthritis meds, supplements, surgeries; money and time wasted on the symptom instead of healing from the root.

And I confess, I did it too. I tried everything from protein shakes and antidepressants to shark-cartilage pills and knee surgeries. Searching for the answer outside when all along, we have all the tools we need right here inside us.



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So I invite you to give permission to yourself to control and extend your breath, and in so doing, control and extend your life.

If a baby can do it, then so can you.

Thank you.

Resources for Further Reading:

[Breathing Happiness: Emma Seppälä at TEDxSacramento \(Transcript\)](#)

[Change Your Breath, Change Your Life: Lucas Rockwood \(Transcript\)](#)

[Max Strom: Breathe to Heal at TEDxCapeMay Conference \(Transcript\)](#)

[Using Mindfulness to Deal with Everyday Pressures: Regina Chow Trammel \(Transcript\)](#)

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