



Cultivating Inner Stillness

A Guide To **Pranayama** Breathwork



Change your breath, change your life. How to reset your nervous system & reclaim your energy.

Veena Blilie
Saumya Ayurveda

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From the Saumya Community....

“Veena's herbal protocols and food recommendations are easy to follow – and effective! Combined with her beautifully-guided relaxation and meditation practices, she offers a truly holistic path to achieving and maintaining harmony of body, mind, and spirit – and living more peacefully and joyfully in an increasingly erratic world.”



GABRIELLA A.
CALIFORNIA, USA

INTRODUCTION:

BREATHWORK: THE FOUNDATION OF HEALING

Pranayama, the yogic science of breath, comes from the Sanskrit words *prana* (life force) and *ayama* (expansion). Through pranayama, we expand and guide the life force within us.

Breath is the bridge between the body and mind—when it is disturbed, we feel anxious, stressed, and overwhelmed; when it flows smoothly, we experience greater calmness, clarity, and vitality.

If you do nothing else for your wellbeing, start here.

Breath is where transformation begins.

MEET VEENA

YOUR GUIDE TO AYURVEDIC BREATHWORK



Veena Blilie is a Certified Ayurvedic Practitioner, meditation teacher, and monk with over 40 years of experience guiding clients back to balance. Her intuitive, grounded approach blends deep traditional knowledge with modern insight, helping people reclaim clarity, vitality, and calm.

From her early years learning herbal remedies at her grandmother's knee to founding Saumya Ayurveda, Veena's life has been rooted in natural healing.

Her mission is simple: to help you return to the way you were meant to feel—relaxed, focused, and fully alive.

CHAPTER ONE: YOUR FOUNDATION

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Before exploring more advanced breathwork, learn to breathe as you did when you were born—with the diaphragm. Diaphragmatic breathing is essential for nervous system regulation, digestion, clarity, and sleep.



“If we haven’t shifted from chest breathing back to diaphragmatic breathing, all the yoga techniques and relaxation practices will be ineffective. That’s why job number one with my clients is to learn diaphragmatic breathing—because it changes their lives.”

CONSCIOUS ENCOURAGEMENT OF HEALTHY BREATHING

We're born breathing well. As infants, we naturally breathe into the belly—slow, full, and effortless. This is called diaphragmatic breathing, and it's the body's most efficient, calming way to breathe.

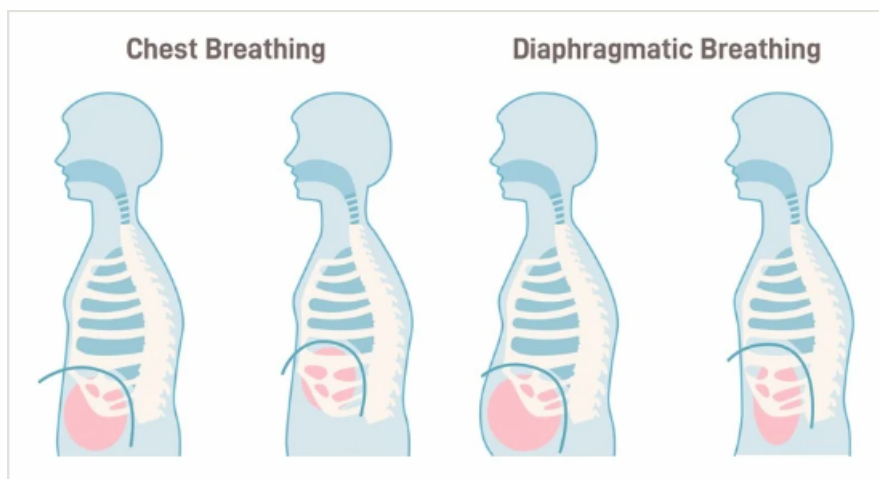
Over time, however, we often lose that natural rhythm. Stress, poor posture, and modern living slowly train us to breathe from the chest instead—shallow and fast.

Chest breathing restricts oxygen flow and reduces lung efficiency. This keeps our nervous system primed to react, instead of rest. Over time, this locks the body in a constant state of low-grade fight or flight, leaving us anxious, tired, and scattered.

When we return to diaphragmatic breathing, everything changes. The nervous system calms. The mind steadies. We feel more grounded, clear, at ease.

That's why I begin all client work here. Without this foundation, no other breath practice can fully take root. But once it returns, the whole being responds.

This simple breath shift initiates profound transformation. And the best part? It's easy to relearn and feels good right away.



WHY IS DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING SO IMPORTANT?

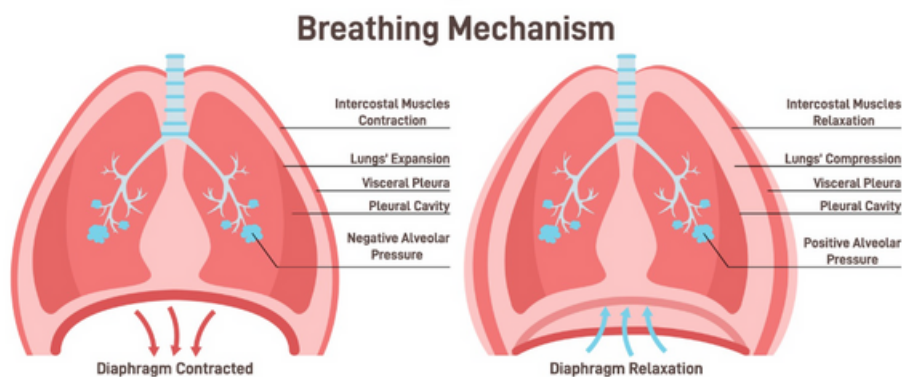
Breath is *prana*—our life force. It's the only vehicle that links body and mind. Through it, we become calm, focused, energized, vital, and balanced. The more we bring gentle awareness to our breath, the more we relax. The mind settles. Clarity returns.

Change your breath, change your life? Absolutely.

It may sound dramatic, but it's the truth. Without breath, where is life?

In English, we lose our breath, catch it, hold it, take a deep one. But the “breath of life”—what we depend on—is the most profound of them all. Breath is often unconscious, yet in Ayurveda and yoga, it is the foundation of healing, focus, and presence.

Breath is life itself. When we return to it, we return to ourselves.



BENEFITS OF DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING

- Provides a gentle massage to internal organs
- Supports healthy functioning of entire body
- Creates a deep sense of relaxation and stillness
- Produces a calm, focused mind
- Reduces stress
- Bolsters the immune system
- Facial expressions soften/open, it's anti-aging.
- Promotes healthy digestion
- Voice tone becomes softer/sweeter
- Supports healthy blood pressure
- Encourages circulation
- Naturally removes toxins (ama)
- Rejuvenates body tissues
- Calms Vata in the nervous system
- Enkindles agni (digestive fire)

WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Diaphragmatic breathing engages the diaphragm, the dome-shaped muscle at the base of your lungs. Instead of shallow chest breathing, you draw the breath deep into the belly. The abdomen expands with each inhale, softens with each exhale.

There's no force, no tension—just a smooth rise and fall, like a wave. This activates the parasympathetic nervous system, calming the mind, steadying emotions, and fueling *agni*, your digestive fire. It's a core practice in Ayurvedic healing.

HOW TO PRACTICE

1. Get in Position

Lie in crocodile, sandbag, or corpse pose— (see pages 7-9 for details). Place one hand on your chest, the other on your lower belly.

2. Exhale completely

Let the belly fall. Feel the body soften and ground.

3. Inhale slowly through your nose

Draw the breath deep into the belly. Feel it rise under your hand. The chest stays mostly still.

4. Exhale smoothly through your nose

Let the belly gently fall back inward. No force—just release.

5. Repeat continuously for 5-10 rounds

No pause at the top or bottom. Let the breath flow like a wave—deep, slow, smooth, even, and quiet. Build up to 5-10 minutes daily.

THE 5 QUALITIES OF DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH

1. Deep

It fills the lower lungs and abdomen, not just the upper chest.

2. Slow

Each breath cycle is unhurried, reducing stress.

3. Smooth

No jerks or pauses. Inhales and exhales flow in a continuous wave.

4. Even

The inhale and exhale are balanced in length and ease.

5. Quiet

The breath is soft and nearly silent, like a gentle breeze.



TRADITIONAL PRACTICE #1: CROCODILE POSE (MAKARASANA)

Lie on your belly with your legs a comfortable distance apart. Your toes can point outward, or inward if that feels better for your lower back. Fold your arms in front of you and rest your forehead on your forearms.

Adjust your position so your chest is slightly lifted off the ground—the first point of contact with the floor in the core of the body is the lowest part of the rib cage. This is where the diaphragm is located.

Inhale and feel your abdomen press into the ground and your body rise subtly like a wave. Exhale and feel your body sink into the floor. Let the breath be natural and unforced. Crocodile pose uses gravity and floor feedback to help you sense your diaphragmatic movement clearly.

WHEN & HOW OFTEN TO PRACTICE

Practice diaphragmatic breathing for 5 to 10 minutes at a time, three to four times per day. It's especially supportive first thing in the morning and again in the evening, when you want to reset your nervous system and feel centered.

Consistency is essential. As you practice at the same time and place daily, your whole being begins to crave it. It becomes a ritual of remembrance. Many begin to feel shifts within a week. Within a month, diaphragmatic breathing can become your natural state. In time, you will always breath diaphragmatically. You will have returned to your natural, healthy breathing.



TRADITIONAL PRACTICE #2: SANDBAG BREATHING

Lie on your back in *śavāsana* (corpse pose). Gently tuck your shoulder blades flat so your chest opens naturally. Relax the body from head to toe. Place a 5-lb sandbag—or a book—on the lower abdomen, just below the rib cage.

As you breathe, feel the abdomen rise and expand with your inhalation and gently fall with your exhalation.

- Practice for 5-10 minutes. You can pair this breathing with [Saumya's guided practices](#)
- Afterward, remove the sandbag and continue to rest in *śavāsana*
- Slowly massage your face, cup your palms over your eyes, and open your eyes into your hands before gently re-engaging with your surroundings maintaining contact with the inner stillness you created

You may gradually increase the weight every few weeks if it remains comfortable—never exceeding 15 lbs. This isn't a "no pain, no gain" practice. It's a gentle re-learning of your natural breath rhythm and gentle strengthening of the diaphragm muscle.

Tip: No sandbag? Use a book or your hand. This practice can travel with you.



TRADITIONAL PRACTICE #3: ŚAVĀSANA OBSERVATION

Lie on a firm flat surface with your head, neck and spine aligned in Śavāsana (corpse pose-see image above). You may cover yourself with a thin blanket or a shawl. If you need, place a thin cushion under your head and a bolster under your knees. Be comfortable. Feel secure.

Place one hand on your abdomen just below the rib cage. You will see the abdomen rise and fall with each breath from the movement of the diaphragm. Contracting and expanding. In this posture, you're expanding the area in all directions.

Allow a gentle awareness to develop about the five qualities of diaphragmatic breathing. If the qualities are not present, there is nothing you need to do. Simply observe how the breath *is* now and in time, with practice, these qualities will emerge naturally. So often on the path of yoga, it is not about doing, but about letting go. Let go and simply observe what *is*.

CHAPTER TWO

The Subtle Science of Pranayama

From both the Ayurvedic and modern scientific perspectives, our breath is central to our health.

In Ayurveda, the breath is the carrier of *prana*—life force—and directly nourishes every tissue, organ, and channel of the body, mind, and beyond. Each breath is a vehicle of energy, rejuvenation, and transformation. When prana is balanced, the mind becomes quiet, digestion enkindles, and the tissues reinvigorate. When breath is shallow or erratic, prana is disorganized, and we experience mental, physical, and emotional instability and depletion.

Modern science mirrors this wisdom. Diaphragmatic breathing is shown to:

- Reduce cortisol and other stress hormones
- Activate the parasympathetic nervous system
- Improve heart rate variability (HRV), a key marker of resilience
- Support the immune system and improve oxygen uptake

The diaphragm is more than a muscle—it's a central player in regulating your autonomic nervous system, affecting everything from digestion to mental clarity to hormonal balance.

Pranayama practices train us to move from unconscious breath patterns to conscious, intentional breath awareness. Over time, this transforms how we respond to life—from reactive to calm, from fragmented to centered, from depleted to vital.

Before practicing formal pranayama, we must first establish a strong foundation in diaphragmatic breathing. Without it, advanced breath practices can agitate rather than harmonize both body and mind. When the breath is steady, the mind follows.

*“The breath is the doorway between the mind and body.
It’s the most direct route to calm, clarity, and resilience.” –*

– Veena Blilie



AYURVEDA & YOGA ARE SISTER SCIENCES

Ayurveda and Yoga are interconnected paths. While Ayurveda is commonly perceived as a traditional holistic healing system, that is just one aspect of the extensive Ayurvedic tradition.

Ayurveda is a way to know--through direct experience--the very nature of life. Breath, diaphragmatic breathing, and meditation are vehicles for that exploration of our expansive inner landscape.

How we breathe can change the flow of *prana* (energy or vital force) throughout our whole being and when *prana* is balanced, we notice that profound and significant change in our life.

When we breathe diaphragmatically, we experience increased vitality, good mental and physical health, clarity, peace, relaxation, focus, calm, increased energy, healthy elimination, better sleep--we feel good! We feel like ourselves.

Fatigue, stress, overwhelm, burnout melt away as we begin to heal our nervous systems and rejuvenate our tired minds, and balance the doshas.

MEDITATION: BREATH AS THE FIRST STEP

Across cultures and traditions, all systems of meditation begin with one simple act—observing the breath. Why? Because the breath is the doorway to our nervous system.

When we become aware of our breath, we activate the part of the brain responsible for conscious choice-making rather than reactive patterns. Diaphragmatic breathing, in particular, helps turn on the parasympathetic nervous system—the rest, restore, and relax response.

Each time you bring awareness to the breath; you are choosing to step into calm. This gentle, consistent act reshapes how you respond to stress, pain, emotion, and life as a whole. It's one of the most accessible and powerful tools available for:

- Lowering blood pressure
- Slowing the heart rate
- Improving focus
- Cultivating deep inner peace

Practicing breath-centered meditation—like the [Two-Minute Meditation](#) offered by Saumya Ayurveda—teaches resilience, rewires reactive thought patterns, and cultivates a state of inner stillness that is untouched by the world.

Start with observing the flow of breath. Then, breathe diaphragmatically. As the body relaxes, you may notice something extraordinary: the breath continues without effort, and you are simply the witness. This is the beginning of profound meditation.

“Veena was able to help me regain my energy in just a few months and I’m feeling like my “young” self again! I love the guided practices—so enjoyable to incorporate into my day.”

- Molly Rossini, Minnesota

CHAPTER THREE

Additional Pranayama Techniques



NADI SHODHANA: ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

Nadi Shodhana, or *alternate nostril breathing*, is a simple yet powerful breathwork practice. It calms the nervous system and balances the *nadis*—the subtle energy pathways that inter-penetrates the physical body.

Also called “*channel purification*,” this technique gently shifts the breath from one nostril (*nadi*) to the other. In doing so, it harmonizes the flow of both breath and energy, bringing the system into balance.

With regular practice, Nadi Shodhana quiets the mind, softens emotional reactivity, and helps prepares you for meditation. It’s one of the most essential yogic breathwork practices for grounding attention, deepening relaxation, and finding calm within.

WHY PRACTICE NADI SHODHANA?

This gentle practice offers lasting benefits, both physically and energetically. It:

- **Balances energy flow** between the left and right sides of the body and mind.
- **Enhances communication** between the brain's hemispheres.
- **Grounds attention** and supports a peaceful mental state.
- **Softens reactivity** to emotional triggers over time.
- **Creates space for deeper insight** and awareness.

Think of it as clearing energetic static to tune into a peaceful, focused state.



WHEN TO PRACTICE NADI SHODHANA

For best results, practice twice a day—once in the morning and again in the early evening. You can also add a midday or nighttime session if helpful.

- Always practice on an empty stomach (at least 2 hours after eating).
- Each session takes about 5–10 minutes, depending on your breath length.
- Nadi Shodhana is best done when you won't be disturbed.

Option One

- First Session: Before breakfast, as part of your Ayurvedic morning routine.
- Second Session: Midday, a couple of hours after lunch.
- Third Session: As part of your Ayurveda evening routine, before bed.

Option Two

- First Session: Before breakfast
- Second Session: Before lunch
- Third Session: Before dinner

STEP-BY-STEP: HOW TO DO NADI SHODHANA

1. Find Your Seat

Choose a stable, upright sitting position:

On a Chair:

Sit near the front of a hard-backed chair, feet flat on the ground, knees at 90°. Avoid leaning back.

On the Floor:

Sit in Sukhasana (easy pose) on a folded blanket or cushion if needed. (See image below)

Keep your head, neck, and spine aligned. Relax your body. Let the breath flow naturally and quietly into the diaphragm.



2. Create the Hand Position (Vishnu Mudra)

With your right hand, form the classic mudra for alternate nostril breathing:

- Fold the index and middle fingers inward toward the palm (rest on the fleshy part below your thumb)
- Leave your thumb and ring finger extended.
- Hold the ring finger just over the left nostril
- Hold the tip of the thumb just over the right nostril

In this position, you can open and shut your nostrils with just a slight movement of your thumb or ring finger. Use a featherlight touch.

STEP-BY-STEP: HOW TO DO NADI SHODHANA

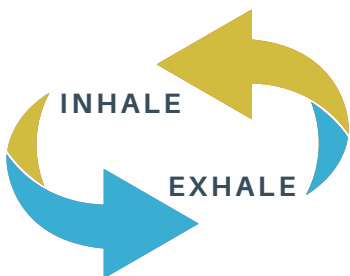
3. Check Your Active Nostril

Before beginning, gently close one nostril at a time and notice which of your two nostrils is flowing more freely. The nostril with stronger airflow is your active nostril, the other is your passive nostril. This helps determine which side to start with.

4. Establish the Breath

Before you begin alternating nostrils, take a moment to establish diaphragmatic breathing—*quiet, smooth, and deep*.

Let your breath flow low into the belly without effort. No force, no sound—just a steady rhythm, like a wave gently rising and falling.



Keep your breath continuous, with no pauses between the inhale and exhale. Imagine the breath tracing a soft, elliptical path, like a figure-eight or a sine wave.

Now, with that calm foundation, begin the practice.

5. Begin the Breathwork

There are many different versions of Alternate Nostril Breathing. The version below is the most simple. Perform each step 3 times.

Round 1

- Lightly close active nostril with your thumb or ring finger.
- Slowly inhale and exhale through the passive nostril (×3)
- Switch fingers to lightly close the passive nostril.
- Slowly inhale and exhale through the active nostril (×3)
- Inhale and exhale through both nostrils (no nostril closed) (×3)

Round 2

- Begin with the active nostril (×3)
- Then the passive nostril (×3)
- Then both nostrils (×3)

Round 3

- Repeat the pattern from Round 1

BHRAMARI: HUMMING BEE BREATH

This practice stills the mind, soothes the nervous system, and relieves stress and anxiety. It is said to support a healthy throat, lower blood pressure, and release emotional tension. Practiced regularly, it promotes restful sleep and a melodious voice.

Best for: Nervous system reset, sleep, emotional release

Avoid if: Ear infection, chest pain, menstruation/pregnancy; epilepsy

HOW TO PRACTICE:

1. Sit comfortably with your spine, neck, and head in alignment. (Avoid lying down.)
2. Close your eyes.
3. Place your thumbs over your ears.
4. Rest your index fingers gently on the forehead, and place your pinky fingers near your nostrils.
5. Inhale deeply through your nose.
6. Hold your breath for a moment and gently press your pinky fingers to narrow your nostrils (not fully closed).
7. As you exhale, create a low-pitched humming sound from your throat, like the buzz of a bee.

TIPS:

- Feel the vibration resonate in your head and body.
- Practice on an empty stomach.
- Complete 5–7 rounds at a slow, relaxed pace.





BHASTRIKA (BELLOWS BREATH)

Best for: Energy boost, clearing Kapha, foggy mind

Avoid if: High blood pressure, heart conditions, pregnancy, recent surgery.

Sit comfortably with a straight spine. Inhale forcefully through the nose, expanding the abdomen, and exhale with equal force. The breath should be rhythmic and rapid.

- Start with 3 rounds of 10 breaths
- Rest and observe in between rounds



SHITALI & CHANDRA BHEDANA

Best for: Pitta imbalances, hot flashes, irritability

Avoid if: Cold, congestion

Shitali: Curl the tongue like a straw (or clench teeth with tongue behind them if you can't). Inhale through the tongue or teeth, feeling the coolness. Close the mouth and exhale through the nose.

Chandra Bhedana: Close the right nostril and breathe in and out through the left only. This calms the nervous system and cools the body.

- Practice for 5 minutes or 12 rounds



UJJAYI (VICTORY BREATH)

Best for: Mental steadiness, emotional regulation

Contraindications: Avoid overstraining the throat

Sit or lie down comfortably. Slightly constrict the throat to create a soft ocean-like sound as you inhale and exhale through the nose. The sound should be gentle, like waves or Darth Vader breathing.

- Practice for 5- 10 minutes
- Maintain even, relaxed breath

Detailed instructions: [Pranayama Breathing Techniques for Beginners](#)

3-STEP BREATHWORK ROUTINE

- 1. AM/PM Diaphragmatic Breathing (5-10 minutes)
- 2. Add advancing pranayama Nadi Shodhana 3 times a day
- 3. Anchor each breathwork session with a systemic relaxation meditation (**Part 2** of [Saumya Ayurveda’s free guided practices](#))



QUICK REFERENCE CHART

BREATHWORK	BENEFITS	BEST FOR	AVOID IF
DIAPHRAGMATIC	Calm, Sleep, Digestion, Focus, Stillness	Everyone	N/A
NADI SHODHANA	Anxiety, Balance, Focus, Stillness	Everyone	Sinus Issues
BHRAMARI	Nervous System, Relaxation, Sleep	Insomnia	Ear Issues
BHASTRIKA	Energy, Kapha	Fatigue	Heart/BP issues
SHITALI	Cooling	Pitta	Cold; Congestion
CHANDRA	Cooling to mind and body, may lower BP	Reactivity	Cold; Congestion
UJJAYI	Mental Clarity	All Doshas	None Notable

Let's go even deeper.

Breathwork is powerful, but it's just one piece of the puzzle. At Saumya Ayurveda, we offer holistic, personalized care that brings all aspects of your life into balance; mental, physical, and spiritual guidance.

Whether you're dealing with chronic stress, hormonal shifts, digestive issues, or emotional fatigue—your breath is the beginning, not the end.

Let these free resources be your next step toward a more grounded, resilient, and vibrant you.

THREE PART GUIDED MEDITATION PRACTICES PROGRAM

WHAT IS AYURVEDA? A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

SAUMYA SHOP: FREE AYURVEDIC EBOOKS

THE HEALING TRIFECTA: A FRAMEWORK FOR BALANCE

HOW TO BUILD AN AYURVEDIC MORNING ROUTINE

"Veena has been an incredible resource to help me get aligned on food, herbs, and mind, body, and soul exercises to feel more grounded and present. I love her daily guided practices, a routine that feels EMBODYING. She has made an outsized impact on my life in a short amount of time."

– Mark Fishman, Colorado, USA



BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY

Book your FREE Ayurveda Consultation

This **15-minute discovery call** is your entry point to vibrant health and deep, lasting life transformation.

Whether you're struggling with fatigue, stress, sleep issues, digestion, or just feel "off," I will listen to your story, help you understand what Ayurveda can offer, and guide you through our care options—**no pressure, no obligation.**

Join clients worldwide who've found clarity, relief, and calm with Saumya Ayurveda's holistic approach. Your breath is just the beginning. **Let's take the next step together.**

Book your free consultation call [HERE](#) or visit www.saumya-ayurveda.com to explore our personalized Ayurvedic services.

"Veena is a blessing, such a rich resource.

I am eternally grateful to her for anchoring me to my present state of health and peacefulness – and for helping me to embark on a path towards the balance we all are striving for."

- Dr. Gauri Nagargoje, M.D.



From the Saumya Community....

If you are looking for someone to help guide you to better health, work/life balance and awareness of your physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being—I recommend Veena without hesitation. After my first consultation and one week of recommended foods, I felt better and had more energy and more mental clarity than I have had in many years.”

LYNDA G., NEW MEXICO, USA

"Finding Saumya Ayurveda was like finding myself again! Veena's advice, humour, support, knowledge and herbs are extraordinary! Thank you for a lifetime of guidance"

EVGENIA GIBBS, UNITED KINGDOM

"Signing up for an Ayurveda consultation package, I was hopeful my mood would improve, my energy would return, and I would start feeling like myself again. What I didn't expect was how simple it would be to get there.

Veena's plan explains everything so clearly—and I'm starting to feel better! I'm also learning how I got out of balance in the first place."

ERIN M., ALBERTA, CANADA

"I am a believer now! Before I met with Veena, I was always tired. I would wake up and then need to take a nap. I had pain all the time. Now, I enjoy walks. The other day, I realized I had no pain for the first time, and I am very happy about that!"

RAMI D., INDIA

See how countless others have transformed their lives with Saumya Ayurveda. **Read more healing stories** [HERE](#).