

The Sanskrit word Vayu translates as “wind,” and the root ‘va’ translates to “that which flows.”

The yogic understanding of the body is experiential rather than theoretical. The fundamental understanding is that the body is an expression of universal source, like a wave is an expression of the ocean. Within this individual expression there are ways that life energy flows like currents in the body of water.

Prana and the breath are intimately tied. Prana moves the breath. Without life force, there is no breath, not the other way around. Within the cycle of breath, prana becomes noticeable.

The five main Vayus - or subdivisions of the life force are:

Prana – the upward flow of energy, which can be felt on an inhalation.

Apana – the downward flow of energy, felt on the exhalation.

Samana – the current of energy that digests as it draws towards our centre

Udana – the current of energy that eliminates as it expands outward from our centre

Vyana – the integrative current of energy that maintains equilibrium.

As a beginner moves the body in asana / joint and glands, it is at first usually ‘an outer body’ experience.

As practice continues, more subtle sensations move into awareness. This is when work with the Vayus begin..

Prana can be felt as an upward moving force on an inhalation when the arms are lifted overhead.

Apana can be felt moving downwards on an exhalation when the arms are brought back to the sides of the body.

Samana can be felt as an integrative force, drawing tissues of the body towards the core.

Udana can be felt as a subtle expression of expansive, or outward moving energy from the core of the body.

Vyana can be experienced by spreading awareness throughout the body, noticing how different parts communicate and are held together.

Our life force, prana, divides itself into five vayus, each governing different functions and aspects of being.

Vayu	Area of Body	Function
Prana	Chest, head	Governs intake, inspiration, propulsion, forward momentum
Apana	Pelvis	Governs elimination, downward and outward movement
Samana	Navel	Governs assimilation, discernment, inner absorption, consolidation
Udana	Throat	Governs growth, speech, expression, ascension, upward movement
Vyana	Whole body	Governs circulation on all levels, expansiveness, pervasiveness

Prana Vayu - is the fundamental energising force. It is the inward moving vital energy that governs respiration and reception, allowing us to take in everything from air and food to impressions and ideas.

Prana-Vayu is situated in the heart, and its energy pervades the chest region. **Prana-Vayu translates as “forward moving air,” and its flow is inwards and upward.**

Prana vayu is most active in the region of the lungs and heart. It provides propulsive energy, speed, motivation, and vitality. On a more subtle level, this vayu gives heightened sensitivity both to the external senses and to inner awareness.

If prana vayu is deranged, we suffer from cravings, fall prey to bad habits, and wrestle with a restless and dissipated mind.

To experience Prana-Vayu: Close your eyes, sit or stand with a long spine and relaxed body, and as you inhale feel an energy flowing up the torso from the belly to the third-eye.

Apana Vayu - which is most active in the pelvis and lower abdomen, governs the eliminative functions (excretion, urination, menstruation) and the downward and outward flow of energy in the body.

Apana-Vayu is situated in the pelvic floor and its energy pervades the lower abdomen. **Apana-Vayu** translates as “the air that moves away,” and its flow is downwards and out.

On the subtle level, apana eliminates not only physical wastes but anything undesirable or threatening to good health.

When apana is weak, the integrity of the mind-body complex is also weakened, and we become susceptible to illness, fear, doubt, confusion, insecurity, and loss of purpose; when it is strong and balanced, apana roots and grounds us, providing the foundation for a healthy body and a flexible positive outlook on life.

To experience Apana-Vayu: Close your eyes, sit or stand with a long spine and relaxed body, and as you exhale feel an energy flowing down the torso from the top of the head to the tailbone, and then out through the legs and feet.

Samana Vayu: is situated in the abdomen with its energy centred in the navel. Samana-Vayu translates to “the balancing air” and its flow moves from the periphery of the body to the centre.

This Vayu’s action is assimilation, its expression is internal, and its associated chakras and elements are Manipura and fire. A weak or dysfunctional Samana-Vayu can manifest as poor judgment, low confidence and a lack of motivation and desire. Issues with digestion can be related to disturbed Samana-Vayu.

To experience Samana-Vayu: Close your eyes, sit or stand with a long spine and relaxed body, and as you inhale and exhale feel the breath rising and falling in the front, sides, and back of the torso.

Udana Vayu: is situated in the throat and it has a circular flow around the neck and head. Udana-Vayu translates to “that which carries upward,” and its flow moves upward from the heart to the head, five senses, and brain. It functions to “hold us up” and governs speech, self-expression, and growth.

This Vayu’s action is metabolism, its expression is verbal, and its associated chakras and elements are Vishuddha & Ajna and ether.

A weak or dysfunctional Udana-Vayu can manifest as speech difficulties, shortness of breath and diseases of the throat. A lack of self-expression, uncoordinated movement or loss of balance can be related to disturbed Udana-Vayu.

To experience Udana-Vayu: Close your eyes, sit or stand with a long spine and relaxed body, and as you inhale and exhale feel the breath circulating around and through the head and neck.

Vyana Vayu: is situated in the heart and lungs and flows throughout the entire body. Vyana-Vayu translates as “outward moving air,” and its flow moves from the center of the body to the periphery.

It governs the circulation of all substances throughout the body and assists the other Vayus with their functions.

A weak or dysfunctional Vyana-Vayu can create feelings of separation and alienation and can create disjointed, fluctuating and rambling thoughts. Poor circulation, impaired nerve stimulation, skin disorders, and nervous breakdowns can be related to disturbed Vyana-Vayu.

To experience Vyana-Vayu: Close your eyes, sit or stand with a long spine and relaxed body, and as you inhale feel the breath radiating outward from the navel to the arms and legs.