

What does Om mean?

Om, or rather Aum, is a mantra. Saying it causes a vibration in your body that, if done properly, can provide a deep feeling of relaxation and even bliss. A simple translation would be 'source' or 'universal consciousness.' But Om is really a sound, one that was originally used to describe how a rishi, or sage, felt during deep meditation. The sound causes precise sound vibrations in your body so that as you chant om, your body is providing a calming awareness on all levels: physical, mental, emotional, *and* spiritual.



If you've never chanted Om out loud for at least a minute, you should really give it a try. Like right now. Use the great description below from Yogapedia as you move through one Om. Then say it again. In fact, say it a few times. Keep your eyes closed as you say it, back erect, ideally with your palms facing upward. As you make the sound, recognize how your body feels; from how your throat sounds to the sensations felt throughout your sitting body in this present moment.

- **A (aahhh)** – This syllable represents the origin of all sound, connecting us to our individual selves, or egos. This resonance should come from the back of the throat where the tongue finds its root in our physical being.
- **U (oooh)** – This syllable represents the energy of the mind and the universe. This vibration invokes balance and clarity as it passes from the back of the tongue toward the lips.
- **M (mmmm)** – This syllable invokes the sensation of oneness between the corporal body and the universe. Practitioners close their lips around the sound to experience the vibration throughout their head and body.

- **Anagata (silence)** – This significant phase of the Om invites yoga practitioners to fully experience the blissful state of silence and the sense of unity it transmits.”

<https://www.yogapedia.com/definition/4957/om>

Now wasn't that refreshing? If you really observe your body as you move through this unique sound vibration, you might recognize that the vibration starts in your chest, moves through your throat, and reaches your head. The silent sound at the end allows that vibration to continue up and out into the world. The thought of that makes me smile. All of us giving our calm vibrations out into the world, to all people.

In Sanskrit, the lower curve represents the dream state, the upper curve represents the waking state, and the middle curve represents deep, dreamless sleep. The crescent shape above stands for the veil of illusion (“maya”) and the dot represents the transcendental state. When your spirit passes through the veil and rests in the transcendental, you are liberated from the three states.

The symbol of Om represents Brahman, the source of all manifest existence. Brahman is incomprehensible, so a symbol helps us identify or recognize the Unknowable. The symbol is recognized to represent the Trimurti, the trinity of supreme divinity in Hinduism, which is typically recognized as the gods Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the transformer).

Om's vibration gives us empathy with the cosmic vibration, which allows us to be connected universally. Furthermore, when we say Om along with a group of others, the vibration is felt even more deeply. Imagine a time when everyone gives their best without any desire for something in return. Om reminds us to be our best, and have high regard for others, because it provides a naturally centered, calm, relaxed effect on your

body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

I encourage you to bring chanting Om into your daily practice. No equipment needed, just your dedicated attention and an open heart will reap you many benefits for time to come!

7 Chakras

When we meditate, we provide an opportunity for our body and mind to connect with the universal oneness that brings us all together on this planet right now. As good as meditation is for each of us, it is good for the world!

Meditation on our chakras helps bring balance also in specific areas. Chakra, an ancient sanskrit word, means vortex or wheel. There are seven main energy centers in our body; each one corresponds to an area on our body and has emotional implications.

Unbalanced, or blocked, chakras can cause emotional and physical problems. Meditation helps bring our chakras in balance, which enables our body and mind to function ideally, and be calm, healthy, and compassionate.

The seven chakras

Red – Muladhara / Root Chakra – Meditation: “Vam” / “I am”

Located at your root; represents grounding, survival, fatigue, inner state is stillness and stability, balancing this chakra gives energy to the physical body, controls fear, increases overall health and helps in grounding. Imbalance: low self esteem, low energy, lack of trust

Orange – Swadisthana / Sacral Chakra – Meditation: “Lam” / “I feel”

Located just above root of genitals; biji (seed) mantra, sacral, desire, pleasure, sexuality, passion, creative block, low sex drive, balancing associated with sexual vitality, physical power. Imbalance: feeling uncreative

Yellow – Manipura / Solar Plexus Chakra – Meditation: “Ram” / “I do”

The abode of fire just above the navel center; confidence, intuition, will, wisdom, power, poor digestion, low self-esteem, inner state is laughter, joy, anger. Balancing this chakra helps calm emotions and tension to help better use intuition. Imbalance: angry and helpless, unable to finish tasks

Green – Anahata / Heart Chakra – Meditation: “Yam” / “I love”

Located at the heart center, in center of chest, above of air, *jiva* (individual soul), form of flame, heart, love, compassion, heart disease, fear of intimacy, helps to balance circulatory system, heart and thymus, also promotes universal oneness. Imbalance: feeling unloved

Blue – Vishuddha / Throat Chakra – Meditation: “Ham” / “I speak”

Located above of ether at base of throat, power, expression, creativity, communication, blue, thyroid problem. Imbalance: difficulty expressing feelings

Indigo – Ajna / Third Eye Chakra – Meditation: “So hum” or “Om” / “I see”

Located between the eyebrows, realm of mind, imagination, psychic ability, intuition, awareness, headaches, depression, poor intuition, balances pineal gland. Imbalance: indecision

Violet – Sahasrara / Crown Chakra – Meditation: “Hamsah” / “I understand”

Located at the crown. Visualize *jiva* in the form of a flame. Visualize white light, connection, wisdom, spirituality, understanding, will, promotes thought. Imbalance: loneliness, depression, apathy

Allow your thoughts to leave your mind. Incorporate chakra breathing into your meditation practice occasionally and see how powerful it can be.

Start slowly. Pick one of these chakras that you see having a slight imbalance. It might be an area in your body where you have a pain, or it may be an emotional issue. Reflect on your individual self and see where you can use some focused attention and self-compassion.

Sit in a position in which you can be comfortable for 20 minutes. With your eyes closed, allow your mind's eye to focus on the chakra that you want to bring in balance. Breathe into the chakra. Inhale deeply, exhale slowly. Keep breathing, and then say the associated mantra above. Go ahead and speak it out loud. If that feels awkward, say it in your mind. On every exhale, for 16 times, say the mantra and keep your mind focused in that area of your body.

Be mindful of the feelings that emerge. There may sometimes be difficult memories or regrets that come to mind. See these as opportunity for growth. Let them be in the past, and use them

as a lesson to be better next time and feel the equilibrium emerge. The more often you can give attention to your imbalances, the sooner you will be fully balanced. Give yourself the time to sit often and focus on areas of disruption in your life and give yourself balance. Constantly work at it and you will reap the rewards. And those around you will reap the benefits as well.

If you care to go beyond meditation to balance chakras, you can also consider chakra stone healing, reiki, and crystals.

Easy vegan stuffing

I'm happy to share this easy recipe for natural stuffing with you!

Dice 1 onion and 3 stalks of celery, cook until soft in plenty of olive oil.

Dice up mushrooms, parsley, green onions while brewing 2 cups of green tea. Add the vegetables to the onions and celery, and add spices as you like – today I used sage, ground pepper, salt, oregano, and garlic.

After the mushrooms are soft, add the two cups of green tea (no need to squeeze the bag). Bring this to a simmer, then turn off burner. Add the soupy mixture to a pan of cubed and dried bread. Mix carefully to make sure every piece of bread finds moisture.

Put covered in the oven at 375 degrees F for 30 minutes, then remove the cover and let brown for another 15 minutes.

That's it. So easy, so healthy!

The Concern of Obesity

It wasn't that long ago that I was over 30 pounds overweight. I was a new mom, and loved my son, but early complications during the pregnancy left me less mobile than I had been, and the scale crept up as the months passed. I stopped doing yoga, and didn't take care of my diet. I stayed vegetarian, but wasn't making very healthy choices, carrot sticks began being replaced with spoonfuls of Nutella. Most people know the typical story. As my son started walking and talking, and I realized that my marriage was crumbling, no doubt my diet and exercise suffered. I eventually split from my husband and moved back to the states. It was a difficult road, and it took me some time, but I found my path to get "back to myself."

I made a really small change to start. You've probably read the articles that outline the basic small changes to make to jumpstart a healthier lifestyle. Park your car in the parking spot farthest from the store, take stairs over elevators, stop eating after 8 pm. These were little changes for me to make. The bigger commitment came when I bought and started wearing a fitbit step tracker. It was so motivational to me, seeing the steps increase each day. At 9 pm, when I saw that I was at 7-8,000 steps and seeing that I was so close to the recommended 10,000 steps, I found myself walking around my house after my son went to sleep, and then going up and down the basement stairs to make it to 10 floors a day.

The greater changes happened when I started tracking my food intake. There is a sense of accountability when you admit what you are eating, on an online app or in a notebook. Amazingly,

I started to eat healthier when I wrote it down. I no longer craved the chocolatey goodness of nut spread, but instead longed for an apple or another fresh, crunchy, and all-natural food choice. Again, the motivation came naturally, which made the choices so obviously easy.

Each day I grew stronger, and each day the weight just slipped away. And years later, the weight is still off.

I'm concerned with the growing rate of obesity in our country. It is disturbing to know that according to The State of Obesity (<https://stateofobesity.org/>), the 2015 national average put high schoolers at a 13.3% obesity rate. Nearly 38% of adults in the United States are obese. This is terrible news. Certain states have higher percentages than others. For example, Colorado has the lowest adult percentages, at 22.3% obese, whereas West Virginia and Mississippi are at a staggering 37%! Let's work to bring these numbers down!

With our hectic lifestyles it can be hard to find time to walk even 3,000 steps. But we have to do all we can to make some movement in our lives. Make walking, or biking, or some light weight lifting a priority in your life. Moving for 10 minutes a day will likely inspire you to add another 5 and then 10 minutes as the weeks progress.

Evolve your health in little steps and see big progress over time. You can do it. Be your own advocate for a healthy lifestyle. Incorporate a healthy habit of movement into your life. I promise you, you'll be very happy with the results!

Machine-Free Exercises to Improve Back Muscles

Back pain affects a lot of us. Many exercise programs focus on thin legs and a solid core, but we could all use a stronger back. We're less likely to sustain injuries while performing sports, but also while performing daily chores such as lifting grocery bags or worse, sitting for hours at a time. Good spine posture is important, and incorporating back strengthening exercises into your routine is a great way to help your body be stronger overall. Read on for some machine-free exercises that are easy to learn, and will get you pumped for strength!

Bent-over Reverse Fly

You can benefit from doing this exercise without weights, but if you can handle it, I recommend holding on to at least 5 pound dumbbells for this. With weights in hands (or not), stand with your feet shoulder distance apart and knees bent slightly. Keep your back straight as you bend slightly forward. Your chest should be over your knees. As you exhale, lift both arms up to the side, elbows slightly bent, as you squeeze your shoulder blades together. Hold for just a moment, then slowly, with control, lower the weights/your hands back down to in front of your knees. Bring your arms back up, for a total of 5 reps, then set the weights back down on the ground.

Turning up the intensity of this exercise is easy: either increase the weights you use, increase the number of reps you do before you break, or you can bend further forward in your initial stance. Be sure to keep your head level with your spine. If it feels painful, decrease the weight you are pulling up.

Superman

Lie belly down with your arms extended above your head, palms

down, and your toes tips resting on the floor. Start by resting your forehead on the ground and take a deep breath in. As you exhale, while keeping your core engaged and your arm and leg muscles strong, lift your arms and legs up off the ground 4-6 inches. Hold this pose tightly for a few seconds, and then inhale slowly as you lower your arms and legs back down.

You can make this more difficult by bringing your limbs higher up, and holding for longer periods. Variations can make it a fun exercise as well, such as lifting alternate hands and legs (right arm and left leg up at the same time). Even though one leg or arm is down, keep those muscles engaged. And be sure to keep your shoulders down and away from your ears. Your gaze can stay on the floor, don't lift your head up.

Bridge

The bridge can be done full, or as a half bridge, and both will help strengthen your lower back muscles. The main muscle used for the bridge is the gluteus maximus, which you might think is only good for making your bum look good, but really it is the foundation of your back, so keep it strong. For half-bridge, start by laying on the ground, knees bent, with your feet flat on the ground, about hip width apart. With your arms at your side, lift your hips up to the ceiling as you push on the floor with your feet. Keep a straight line from your chest to your knees as you breathe deeply for a few breaths in this pose. Lower your back slowly to the floor, take a few breaths in and repeat. Do this 15-20 times.

When you are strong enough, you can do full bridge. For this, start with your feet in the same place, but instead of keeping your arms at your sides, place your hands palm down next to your ears – your wrists facing away from your body, and your fingers just under your shoulders. Start by pushing up on your hips, and once they are up, use your arms to put the top half of your body up to meet your hips. Keep in this pose for as

many breaths as you can – start with 5 and work up to 10. Come down slowly, ensuring that your head comes up to keep your spine long. Try to roll down the spine, one vertebrae at a time. Do the full bridge 3 times then when you are done, bring your knees into your chest and squeeze to release the tension from the pose.

Incorporating these poses into your home workout will strengthen your back muscles, which in turn makes your core even tighter. Just takes a few extra minutes in your daily exercise routine. Add these exercises ... your back will thank you.

Setting Goals that Work

The first rule in setting a goal is to know what you want to achieve. I know it sounds simple, and, really, it is. Half the battle for most people is that they don't know what they want, *specifically*. It is important to make goals that can be measured, that are specific, that have a time frame, are relevant and attainable. Don't just say you want to earn a lot of money within 12 months. Say, "I want to earn \$150,000 by the end of this December."

Writing down your goals is also really important. This gives you a measure to check them off as they are realized. Making specific, measurable goals provides motivation to do more and attain more. It is also important to review your goals over time to see what you've achieved, and how much further you have to go.

If you want to be really productive in marking off your goals, first start out by making an inventory of the long term things you want to achieve. Do you want to change careers, do you

want to learn a new language, do you want to have a child? There is no limit to where you end up, but you have to know where you want to go. Only then can you decide which road to take to get there. Once you know what you want to do over the next 5-10 years, break down your big items into smaller, achievable targets that will successively help you achieve the long term goals. Next, make a list of action steps for each of these targets. Ideally, you give yourself a very specific time frame to achieve each item.

It is really important to take stock at least once a month on your goals. Have you set your expectations too high? Too low? Gain some perspective as you look back at what you wanted last month, see if your long term goals have changed at all, and go ahead and update your blueprint. The more explicit you can be in what you want, the sooner you will achieve it.

When you make your goals, make them performance goals, not outcome goals. You are the one that controls your destiny. Not a team, or your boss. You should set goals for YOU; don't let those around you dictate the outcome of your goals. Focus on smaller goals. Having attainable goals that you can track will give you the confidence to do more and gain more in your life.

Take time to really appreciate your achievement of each goal. Consider how long each goal took you to achieve, and determine if you want to step up your game or give yourself a little more leniency. If after a month you see you aren't checking items off a list, then you may want to ease up on your expectations. Making short term goal lists and checking them off as you achieve them will give you a great sense of accomplishment.

Again, be specific in what you yourself can do and achieve with a reasonable timeframe. Your goals should be your own, not drawn from a list someone else created. Rather than make a longer list of all things you want to achieve in 10 years, you can make a 10-year goal, a five-year goal, a six-month goal,

and a one-month goal. Decide what are the most important things you want to achieve, then break down the action steps to make these dreams a reality.

Your big goals should be used as inspiration to keep you moving, and will always be a representation of your passion. Making action steps for your targets to achieve each goal makes it realistic to achieve each big goal. Baby steps take you a long way!

A trick that many others won't share with you regarding goal setting is the importance of visualization. Once you have your list of goals, you can undoubtedly achieve them faster if you spend a few minutes, really even just a few seconds, each day closing your eyes and seeing yourself achieve the goal. If you want to sign on 5 new clients each week for the next month, spend some moments each day visualizing being on the phone with those clients, or visualize your bank statement number getting exponentially larger. You have to have serious intention to get what you want. You have to want it, but you also have to know specifically what you want. Be sure to review, or talk about, your goals on a daily basis. Only if you continue to think about them, and share with others (this helps with accountability), will you be truly successful.

Take time to make your goals; be specific and dream big. Break down each big idea into actionable steps and before you know it, you'll achieve big success in your amazing goals!

3 Natural Beauty Masks

There was a very brief time at the beginning of my freshman year of college when I wore makeup. I think the only real reason that I wanted to wear it was because I was forbidden to

do so when growing up. I don't remember lamenting at any point during my childhood, not even when I was a teenager, that I couldn't wear makeup. But once it was within the realm of not "getting in trouble," I took the opportunity.

Wearing makeup didn't last long for me. In reality I think I was too lazy to put it on. It never became a true habit for me. But also, I preferred the natural look anyway. It started to feel very fake to put these substances on my skin to alter it. I embraced my natural tones, and after giving away whatever makeup I got with my one-time Mary Kay sign-up, I decided to stay au naturale for time to come.

Ever since I got the hint from my older sister (who also embraces a natural approach and does not wear makeup) to use Oil of Olay on my face, I have kept the skin on my face soft and smooth.

As I get older, of course the texture of my skin becomes a little tougher, so I've been looking at natural, homemade facial masks to give myself a little pampering and allow my skin a bit of a break from the day-to-day wear and tear.

I wanted to share with you three natural masks that I've uncovered. Perhaps you'd like to try one or all of them at some point.

1. The banana method

Use a fork to mash up a ripe banana (a medium sized banana is ideal) and mix it until it becomes a smooth paste. Take care to not mix it too much, as the longer you stir the banana, the more liquidy it becomes. Apply the mashed banana to your face and neck, avoiding your eyes and lips. Allow the banana work its wonder on your skin for 15-20 minutes, then simply wash it off with cold water. After employing this technique a few times, you'll notice your skin feels softer as the natural moisturizer hydrates works its magic. Bananas are rich in potassium and vitamins E and C, all of which contribute to

providing your glowing and clear skin. Banana is naturally an exfoliator, and will remove dead skin in a way that normal washing will not. Alternate versions of the banana mask are to add 2-3 tablespoons of plain yogurt and/or 1-2 tablespoons of honey for additional moisture. Another recommendation is to add a $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of lemon juice, which helps especially with reducing oily or greasy skin. Bananas have been called “nature’s botox” as regularly (twice a week) applying a banana mask helps to reduce wrinkles and naturally fades dark spots. The inside of a banana peel can also be rubbed on acne and pimples to reduce inflammation and kill bacteria. For a brighter skin tone, you can also add tumeric to the mixture.

2. The Vinegar method

This one is even easier as you don’t have to wash it off! Mix 2 tablespoons of apple cider vinegar with 2 cups of water. After you’ve washed your face, apply the solution to your face and let it dry. The natural elements will give your skin a deep clean and will also tighten your skin. Apple cider vinegar gives your skin such a boost as it restores your skin’s proper pH levels and its beta-carotene helps protect against future skin damage. Applying apple cider vinegar directly on age spots, acne scars, and even fresh pimples will help them fade. To take this method up a spa notch, dip a washcloth in the mixture and allow the cloth on your face for 15 minutes while you rest and mindfully breathe. The acidic properties of vinegar means that excess oil on your face will be absorbed, your skin will feel smoother, and fine lines will be reduced.

3. The Powdered Milk method

I don’t usually have powdered milk in my pantry, but after I tried this mask, it has become a staple! Take $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of powdered milk and add a little water, just enough to form a thick paste. Apply to your face, and allow to dry – usually 15 minutes. You can rinse with warm water, or remove with a warm

washcloth. This natural cleanser, rich in vitamins and minerals, will give your skin a glow. The lactic acid aids to lighten and smooth your skin. Collagen production is increased by applying this mask, and it also helps to heal itchy skin. Powdered milk also destroys blackhead and whitehead pimples!

Another recipe to use if you want to achieve lighter skin is to mix 2 teaspoons of citrus juice and 1 teaspoon of oatmeal powder to 1 teaspoon of milk powder. You will be glowing after a month of applying this mask.

Like with the banana, you can also add 1 teaspoon of turmeric to 2 teaspoons of milk powder and 1 tablespoon of honey to zap pimples. Apply to your face, allow to dry out completely and rinse with warm water. You'll see blemishes disappear as well.

I'd be happy to hear your variations on these natural masks and to learn about your personal results. Please leave comments below.

Limitless Inflammation

Crushes

I count myself lucky to have never been seriously sick. I know enough people who have a hard time moving from stiff joints, pained backs, or the immobility that being overweight brings. Not being able to move as you want is exhausting and often leaves one less productive than desired. This can lead to feeling down and certainly unmotivated.

Since I've been taking EvolvHealth products, I feel much calmer, am clearly driven to do more than ever, and best of all I'm clear thinking—a sweet relief for me with so much on

my mind these days!

I was first interested in Evolv because of Limitless. I believed the anti-inflammatory benefits would be good for my athletic partner. Little did I know that it would be such an integral part of my daily life. Limitless has zero sugar; it fights fatigue, supports mental alertness, promotes joint comfort and flexibility, and fights free radicals.



Evolv Limitless contains a targeted concentration of beet root extract—with “nature’s anti-inflammatory,” betalains—found to reduce inflammatory markers by up to 47% in a clinical study ([click here to read a copy of the study](#)). Extracted using a patented process that leaves out all the nutrient-damaging, high-calorie sugar, the active ingredient in Evolv Limitless gives you a zero calorie, high-powered way to help you live life limitless!

I’ve heard some amazing testimonials about how Limitless provides a better quality of life that are way more sensational than mine. I can’t tell you that I no longer have knee pain while walking, or that I can hold a non-dementia restricted conversation, but I know that I am hands down more alert and upbeat from this little twice daily pill.

How to Properly Clean Produce

With all the toxic pesticides in use these days, it is surprising that we even keep eating fruits and vegetables, never mind being nudged to increase our daily intake! Organic produce is definitely always the way to go if you can find and afford it. Organic or not, it is important to clean produce

well, and even when you are buying from the farmer's market. I'd like to share some tips on washing fruits and vegetables and in another post we'll look at best ways to store your food at home.

First off, only use cold water to wash the food, and don't use detergents. Use your fingers under the running water to clean off the surface of your produce, and be sure to really tackle crevices where pesticides, herbicides, and bacteria like to settle – like the top of the apple, or under the strawberry green. For thicker skinned items, such as potatoes, it is helpful to use a vegetable brush to banish hard-to-remove microbes. After you wash the food, using a clean cloth or paper towel will help remove even more bacteria.

For leafy greens, if they are not sold as pre-washed, then the best way to get them clean is to soak them in cool water for a few minutes. If you don't have a salad spinner to whisk them dry after draining, you can lay them on a clean towel to dry. Be sure to clean your salad spinner after every use with warm soapy water.

You can usually wait to clean your produce until you are ready to eat it to avoid damage. And be sure to store your veggies properly: tomatoes should be kept outside the fridge, as well as onions, potatoes, garlic, unless already cut.

Include a large percentage of produce in your diet, and be sure to properly clean it so you can feel the benefits of a healthy body gained through good nutrition.

5 Minute Meditation

Most days it seems there is just never enough time. But finding 5 minutes daily to find inner peace can really be quite manageable.

If you make it intentional, setting aside 5 minutes a day is easy. Over time, you might challenge yourself to add 1 or 2 minutes more each day, slowly but surely, and in really no time you will be up to 20 or 30 minutes daily, which will provide you with so many benefits.

THE METHOD

Set aside time each day, preferably at the same time daily, to give yourself a relaxing moment. Your phone should be turned to mute, or better yet, placed in another room.

When you close your eyes, be sure to relax your mind and body. As you breathe in and out, envision any tension in your body being released. The energy might find its way out through your hands, your feet, or perhaps your head.

Watch the stress flow away as you focus on your breath. If you find your mind wandering, count from 1 to 10 and repeat as often and as slowly as possible. As thoughts enter your mind (distracting you), go back to 1 and keep counting up.

You can also focus on the feelings in your body such as a discomfort in your right knee, or realizing your back is slouching, or your chin is dropping. Keep your mind as present as possible, which will enable you to keep your mind still.



MAKE IT STRONGER

Once you accomplish 5 minutes a day for a week or 10 days you will see how easy it is to incorporate this simple benefit

into your life. You will be sure to go back to your day feeling relaxed and refreshed and probably even proud of the steady accomplishment.

Be sure you sit in a comfortable position with loose clothing. Don't focus on if you are doing it right, just go back to the counting and breathing. Keep your mind in the present moment, wherever that might be.

Don't judge, just be. And relish these few moments that you give to yourself, which makes you a better human.

Namaste.

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