

NUMBER OF RUDRAKSHA TO BE WORN

7

here are two approaches to determine how many rudrakshas one should wear. In the first approach, one can follow what the epics say about the number of beads to be worn on specific body parts like the neck, the wrist, the arm and so on. The second approach is to follow the traditions practised in the society in which one lives or the family to which one belongs, as these have also got evolved based on beads' availability and experiences.

The number of rudrakshas to be worn on different parts of the body as recommended in our epics is summarized as follows:

Body parts/organs	No of beads	Epic sources
Shikha (crown hair)	1	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Wrists (both right & left)	12/12	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Neck	32	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Forehead	40	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Ears (both right & left)	6/6	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Chest	108	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Shoulders	500	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Yajnopaveet (sacred thread)	108	Shrimad Devibhagavata

Body parts/organs	No of beads	Epic sources
Neck	2 rows	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Other parts of the body e.g. as earrings, crown, waist belt, in abdomen, etc.	3 rows	Shrimad Devibhagavata
Crown	550	Shiva Puran
Crown	1,100	Shiva Puran
Yajnopaveet (sacred thread)	360 (3 rows) & 120 each	Shiva Puran
I (crown hair)	1 & 3	Shiva Puran
Ears (both right & left)	6/6	Shiva Puran
Neck	101, 50, 32	Shiva Puran
Forearm (both right & left)	11, 16, 24	Shiva Puran
Karpoordvara	11	Shiva Puran
Wrists (both right & left)	11, 12	Shiva Puran
Yajnopaveet (sacred thread)	3 strings each of 108	Shiva Puran
Waist region	5	Shiva Puran
Forehead	30, 40	Shiva Puran
Shoulders	500	Shiva Puran
Heart (chest)	108	Shiva Puran
Forehead	30	Shiva Puran
Neck region	36	Shiva Puran
Forearms (both right & left)	16/16	Shiva Puran

Body parts/organs	No of beads	Epic sources
Wrist (both right & left)	12/12	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Shoulders	15	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Yajnopaveet (sacred thread)	108	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Neck region	2, 3, 5 & 7 rows	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Crown	–	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Kundal (as earring)	–	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Ear ornament	–	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Wrists	–	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Waist	300 (mean) 500 (medium) 1,000 (best)	Rudrakshajabalopanisad
Eyes (both right & left)	4/4	Nirunayasindhu
Neck region	32	Nirunayasindhu
Forehead	40	Nirunayasindhu
Ears (both right & left)	6/6	Nirunayasindhu
Wrists (both right & left)	12/12	Nirunayasindhu
Forearms (both right & left)	16/16	Nirunayasindhu
Sikha (crown hair)	1	Nirunayasindhu
Heart (chest)	108	Nirunayasindhu

The total number of rudrakshas to be worn over the body also varies in different epics. For example, it can be 108, 249, 1,000, 1,008 or 1,111 rudrakshas. The picture (Fig. 41) shows

our house priest wearing a rudraksha meditation dress with 1,111 beads. We have made a meditation dress with 2,780 rudrakshas (after consulting different epics and with the highest number mentioned in them for a particular part of the body) for wearing over head, arms and wrists, heart, neck, waist, ears and eyes. Wearing such a divine and powerful dress and performing meditation will lead to calm and serene feeling from within. However, it is not practical for all to use such large number of beads on a regular basis. My suggestion is to use as many rudrakshas as possible and make it a point to choose larger beads for wearing over chest to get better acupressure effect. The malas on the neck must go up to the level of the heart at the minimum and it should be two inches above the navel as maximum length.

It is necessary to understand the difference between a mala and a combination of beads. The main differences are:

1. A mala, whether for wearing or for jap, is continuously strung with beads with gaps for knots only. Generally, a mala has only one type of bead; for example, a rudraksha mala will have only rudrakshas and a tulsi mala will have only tulsi beads.

2. A combination can be in the form of a thread or silver/gold chain around neck and beads at the bottom. Different materials can be used in a combination, e.g. gems can be used along with rudraksha. Sphatik beads can also be used in some regularity for adjusting length or for good looks.

Wearing of different materials (which are accepted as useful and may have some curative or divine properties) is perfectly right for spiritual purposes. One can wear tulsi, sphatik, sandalwood, keharwa (amber) and rudraksha malas separately, if one has faith in a particular God (Shiva,

Durga, Vishnu, Ram, Krishna, etc.). However, if these materials are being used for health purposes, it is advisable to consult an expert. For example, those suffering from asthma are not advised to wear sphatik along with rudraksha.

Some people get taabeej (talisman) made from some source, which they consider very powerful while others choose tiger nails (though these are banned, some get them from old stocks or through inheritance). Many are found choosing metal pendants of Shree Yantra, Ganesh, Hanuman, Krishna or any God or Goddess and become confused whether to wear these with rudraksha. Our opinion is that as rudraksha is a natural and holy product having no specific branding, it can be used with devotion for worshipping any God or Goddess.

People wearing fake rudraksha beads are advised that they should remove such beads after it is confirmed as fake or spurious by any expert or by oneself as anything, which is not genuine, is likely to give negative influence.

Further, in accordance with family traditions or due to mindset, many do not use tulsi and rudraksha beads together. There is nothing wrong in wearing these holy materials together. We find that in Hindu culture a lot of effort has been made in the past to bring Shaivaites and Vaishnavaites together. There are temples in which Hari (Vishnu) and Har (Shiva) are worshipped in a unified form. Goswami Tulsidas had composed Harishankari verse to offer unified prayers of Lord Shiva and Lord Ram. It is included in Vinayapatrika, which is one of the finest works of poetry in Hindi literature. In Ramcharitmanas, which is the greatest work of this poet, Lord Ram says “anyone calling himself my devotee and by conviction is an opponent of Lord Shiva will be condemned and he is destined to get punishment within this life and also

in the next life” Shaligram shilas, which are revered by Vaishnavaities, have been used to make Shivalinga and several efforts have been made to bring these two sects into one fold. Lord Krishna has worshipped Lord Shiva and vice versa. Lord Vishnu had offered one of his eyes when He fell short of one lotus flower while worshipping Lord Shiva and Lord Shiva has worshipped Lord Vishnu. Therefore, rudraksha is not confined to only Shaivites. I feel a majority of people in our country accept this view.

A mala is a continuous arrangement of the beads without a break, while a combination can be made of few beads threaded or capped using metal and tied to a thread or chain around neck, wrist and/or on arms. In case of combination also, one should use a minimum of three beads. There are divergent views on this as wearing of one bead is also recommended. Experience, however, suggests use of a minimum of three beads and preferably a full mala of 108+1 beads even if the size of the beads is smaller. One should get more coverage from rudraksha as suggested by most of the epics. In case you wish to wear an expensive or rare bead, which you have only one, then it can be used along with two other cheaper and easily available beads like four, five or six mukhis of bigger size or get it attached to a mala made of smaller-sized beads making a total of 54+1 or 108+1.

Shiva Puran defines a meditation dress as:

Three strands of 120 rudrakshas, each to be worn across the chest as Yagnopaveet, one strand of 108 rudraksha for chest, 11 rudraksha each on both wrists and arms (total 44), six rudrakshas on each ear, five rudrakshas on naval, 32 rudrakshas on throat, and 550 rudrakshas on head. This way, a total of 1,111 rudrakshas make a meditation dress and is considered

auspicious for attaining rudrahood.

Shrimad Devibhagwat (Ref. 2) recommends:

One on the tuft, 30 on the head, 36 on the neck, 16 on each arm (total 32), 12 on each wrist (total 24), 50 on the shoulders, and 108 as Yagnopaveet. In addition, some rudrakshas should be worn around the neck to make the total number to 300. As per this epic, 300 numbers of rudrakshas is the minimum, 500 is recommended and 1,000 is the best.

Rudrakshajabalopanishad, (Ref. 15) suggests:

One on tuft of hair (shikha) 30 on head, 36 on neck, 16 each on arms, 12 each on each wrists, 15 on shoulders, 108 as Yajnopaveet and 2x108 or 3x108 or 5x108 or 7x108 around neck.

In general, it can be said that epics recommend the use of as many rudrakshas as possible.

In case of a mala for jap, use 27+1, 54+1 or 108+1 beads. Those believing in numerology should consider the following numbers as auspicious for different objectives (for jap only):

32 or 30 for wealth

100 for thousands of mahapurashcharans

102 for merits and knowledge

104 for health and strength

107 for final liberation (nirvan or moksha)

108 for righteousness (dharma), wealth, desire and the final liberation.

For Gayatri jap, some people make special mala having 24 beads and a meru separately.

For wearing, use any odd number, say 3, 5, 7 etc., in case

of a combination. Avoid wearing a single rudraksha with following exceptions:

Fourteen mukhi can be used singly, preferably wearing over forehead (on the ajna chakra between the eyebrows). It can be used around neck also.

Eleven mukhi has to be knotted on the tuft of crown hair (shikha). (This is not practical in today's context and hence it is better to wear around the neck.)

One mukhi around neck

Nine mukhi on the left hand wrist

Six, thirteen mukhi on the right arm

Five mukhi as a mala around neck.

Shrimad Devibhagawat has given importance to following rudrakshas:

One mukhi, five mukhi, eleven mukhi and fourteen mukhi.

These can be worn as mentioned above.

Gaurishankar rudraksha should be worn around neck only and avoid using it on arms or wrist.

Fifteen and higher mukhis should be worn around neck

The total number of beads in a mala for wearing around neck or over the chest near the heart can be any of the following: 27, 54, 108, 32, 36, 50, 101; however, out of this, 108 is the most auspicious. There is no need to put an extra bead as 'meru' in such a mala as it is not being used for jap. Smaller Indonesian beads are comfortable to wear in more numbers, but one should try to wear as many bigger Nepal beads as possible. Please note that while counting the number of rudraksha beads, no other bead of sphatik, gold, silver, sandalwood, etc. should be included; count only the rudraksha

beads to arrive at the auspicious number mentioned above as desired. Also keep a clear distinction between a mala and a combination.

Normally, it is recommended that the mala or rudraksha you are wearing around the neck or over the heart is not visible to others. It is therefore necessary to select the length of the mala carefully. Exceptional cases can only be the oversized beads, which cannot be covered and hidden under the collar of the shirt or you wish to wear around neck strictly as per yogic practices for meditation. If you are wearing a bracelet over the wrist or on the forehead or on the tuft as laid down in the epics, it shall be visible and it is graceful. There are some people who say that cosmic energies from the skies get absorbed by rudraksha if it is exposed. But, this is not true. The most important requirement is that rudraksha should touch the skin. Except for sadhus and gurus who may not be wearing shirts, it is better not to make the beads visible to others. But, since it is a beautiful spiritual symbol there is no harm as such in wearing it outside, if the situation so demands.

Significance of 108 numbers

1. There are 108 upanishads
2. The four segments (charans) of each of the 27 lunar asterisms (Nakshatras), that is, 27×4 makes 108. Hence, it is a cosmic number.
3. The bead symbolizes the 108 sensate foci in our body.
4. In Sanskrit language, there are 50 alphabets and seven vowels. The alphabets, if written in opposite direction (anulom), give another 50 numbers. The letter 'ksh' is a central extra letter having a unique place. Total becomes $50+7+50+1=108$. In mala sanskars

(purification) ritual, each bead is sanctified using one letter as given in this description.

5. The names of Vishnu and Shiva as given in the Mahabharat are also 108 each.
6. Major psychiatric illnesses, according to the Ayurvedic system, are 108
7. Shatpath Brahman states in its tenth part that one sanvatsar has 10800 auspicious moments (muhurts). Rigved, Yajurved and Samved have 10800 couplets (These numbers if shared by each one year of theoretical life span of a human being, which is 100 years, we get a figure of 108 for muhurts and also couplets.).

Jap mala in other sects

In Jainism a japmala has 108 beads. Usually, the mala is made using sandalwood, thread, gold, silver, marble, gomed (precious stone) or vegetable seeds.

In Buddhism the mala is called 'rudra' and has 108 beads. It is a symbol of Avlokiteswar, a king who killed 108 bandits who attacked the Buddhist monastery. The beads are made from sandalwood, pure wood, gold, silver, pearls, diamond, ruby, glass, bone etc.

Sikhs call it 'simarni' and it has 108 beads. It is based on the fact that there are 108 quotes of the guru in 'Guru Granth Sahib'. The mala is made of rudraksha, sandalwood etc.

In Christianity, it is called 'rosary' and has 58 beads strung with a cross. The numbers are based on the following belief:

- a. The cross indicates faith in God and in the memory of Jesus, who underwent suffering on the cross.
- b. The first bead adjacent to the cross is God

- c. The next three beads are the three forms of energy – energy of will, energy of knowledge and energy of action.
- d. The fifth bead is in memory of the mission of the Lord
- e. The three triangular beads symbolize happiness, unhappiness and bliss
- f. $10 \cdot 5 = 50$ beads represent the following five secrets of Jesus – Creation, Sustenance, Dissolution, The covering of great illusion and the Initiation.

These malas are made from the stem of the rose plant. Mother Mary was fond of roses and hence the name rosary.

Among Muslims the mala is called Tasabi. It has 33 or 99 beads. Allah has 99 names. Tasabi is made from marble, opium, ivory, camel bones, seashells, date seeds, cannabis seeds, horn and pearls. Beads made of clay from Mecca are the most sacred.

In Zoroastrian, the mala is called Tasabi. It has $101+1=102$ beads. This represents 101 names of the Lord.