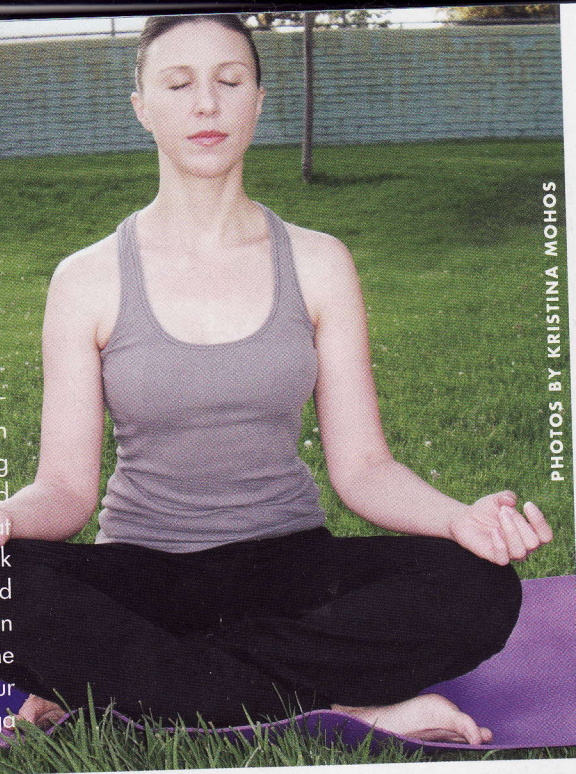


# YOGA for HEADACHES

According to the National Headache Foundation, "over 45 million Americans get chronic, recurring headaches." A study published in *Headache Journal* noted that headache sufferers who took yoga for three months reported a drop in stress, headache pain and the need for medication. The next time a headache rocks your world, give these relaxing yoga postures a try.

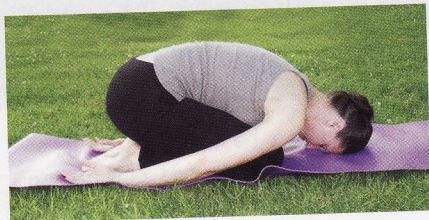


PHOTOS BY KRISTINA MOHOS

## BREATHING AND MEDITATION

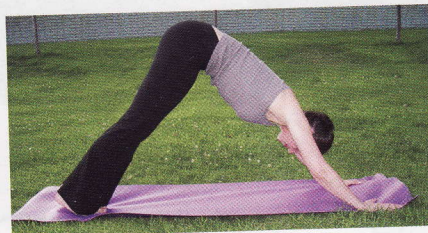
The traditional close to any yoga practice is meditation. In a study at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences in India, tension headache sufferers who received 30 sessions of yogic meditation reported less pain. Meditation can be as simple as focusing on your breath. In fact, yoga's "cleansing, balancing, energizing and restorative postures all have one common denominator—an emphasis on breathing," writes Cyndi Lee, author and founder of Om Yoga in New York.

Begin in a comfortable seated position. Sit with the back straight and arms relaxed. Close your eyes and inhale, exhale. Think only of your breath. Your thoughts may wander, if they do, calmly return to focusing on your breath.



## CHILD POSE (BALASANA)

Begin in a kneeling position and sit back onto your heels. With knees hip-width, fold the upper body onto your thighs. Rest your arms back alongside your torso, palms up. Rest forehead on the floor and let shoulder blades widen. Relax in this pose for one to three minutes.



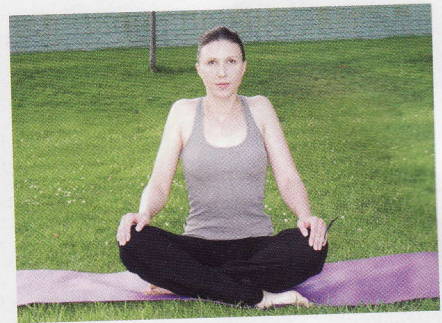
## DOWNWARD FACING DOG (ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA)

Begin with hands and knees on the floor. Align knees directly under hips. Place palms in front of shoulders. Spread fingers, curl toes. Exhale as you lift knees. You may keep the knees bent and heels lifted. As flexibility allows, push sitting bones toward the ceiling, gently straighten knees (without locking them) and place heels on the floor.

Enjoy this tension-relieving pose for one to three minutes. This pose increases blood and oxygen flow to the brain and encourages deep breathing. For some, inverted poses like Down Dog may aggravate an acute headache, so go at your own pace.

Lex Gillan, 40-year yoga veteran and owner of the Yoga Institute in Houston, Texas, suggests lying in Corpse pose and establishing the Ujjayi breath for two minutes. For this yogic breathing, gently constrict the opening of the throat to consciously pull in air on the inhalation and push air out on the exhalation. Ujjayi breath is long, smooth and relaxing. A trained yoga teacher can help you learn this method of yogic breathing.

After the breath is established, Gillan says, "on the in-breath, visualize breathing



## KUNDALINI HEADACHE REMEDY

Formulated by Yoga Yoga founder Mehtab Benton, this can be practiced anywhere—even at your desk. Do "shoulder shrugs with the breath...inhale up, exhale down. Inhale up and hold. Relax down" for one to three minutes. Then do "head rolls with a slow inhale at the top of the circle and an exhale at the bottom—reverse directions." This relieves tension in the neck and shoulders and pumps fresh oxygen to the brain.

## MOUNTAIN POSE (TADASANA)

Stand tall with feet shoulder-width apart, facing forward. With a straight spine, shift your weight gently—forward and back, side



to side. Find your balance on strong, steady legs and rooted feet. Imagine your head floating free, like a balloon, on top of your shoulders. Let your arms dangle by your sides. Visualize your palms open and receptive. Practice relaxed breathing for 10 inhalations.

in positive energy or light...on the exhale, imagine your breathing energy flowing into either your left hand or your right hand." According to Gillan, this exercise can reduce blood pressure in the head.

As you incorporate yoga into your daily schedule, use your practice time to imagine yourself as you most wish to be—serene and unruffled, abundant and successful, confident and free.

—Laurie Chance Smith