Lewis Headache Center

Yoga for Headache & Migraine

Barrow Neurological Institute

Why is yoga important in managing my headache or migraine?

Stress is a common and well known trigger for migraine. And let's face it! Life is busy these days. We often find ourselves rushing from one thing to the next, day in and day out. It's hard to avoid or prevent it, so it would be helpful instead if we learn how to change and control our reactions to how we deal with stress. Practicing yoga is one way to better manage our daily stressors, and by doing so, we are more equipped to calm our brain and body when experiencing headache and migraine.

How do we do this?

Yoga's ability to help manage the stress of our modern life has been extensively researched. Helpful techniques we can implement to manage our stress include yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, biofeedback, mindfulness based stress reduction, and regular cardiovascular exercise.

Let's try some yoga techniques below.

Breathing Exercises:

Breath Awareness

Take a moment, and count the length of your inhale and exhale. Initially, don't change the number, just observe.

Extending the Breath

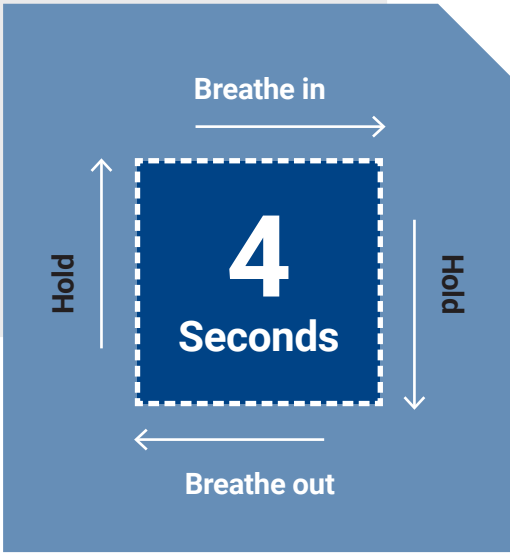
Slowly change your breathing to inhale for three counts, and exhale for three counts. Then progress to inhale for four counts, exhale for four counts. Notice any changes in your body and mind.

Then progress to the next exercise:

Box Breathing

Grab a timer, and take a comfortable seat. Find your breath, then inhale four counts, hold four counts, exhale four counts, hold four counts. Repeat this simple technique for three to five minutes. Take a moment and reflect on how your mind and body feels.

Our breath is a direct connection to our parasympathetic nervous system, which helps to calm our body and mind from stress.



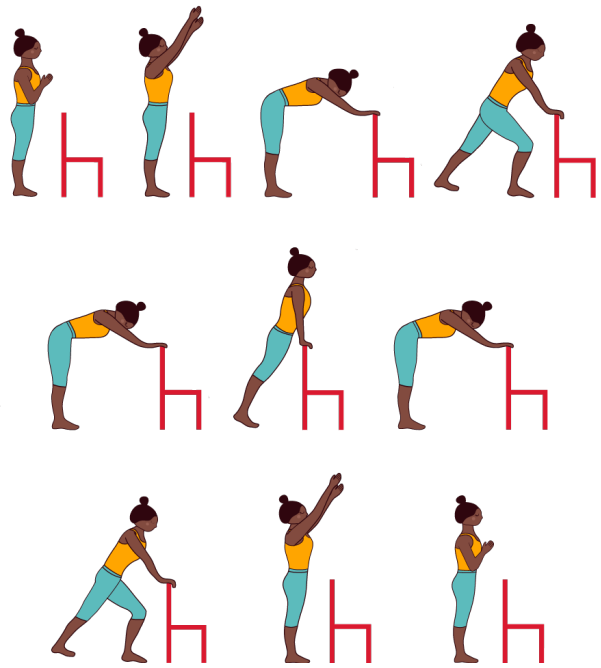
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Yoga

Modified Sun Salutations

A classical sun salutation is a wonderful way to stretch the body, however it might not be appropriate for you if you cannot tolerate lowering your head below your heart. Try the following modified sequence as an alternative:

1. Place a chair with the backrest facing towards you a couple feet in front of you. Stand up tall, with your feet hip distance apart, and exhale while you bring your hands together in front of you.
2. **Inhale:** Reach your arms up overhead.
3. **Exhale:** Reach and hold on to the back of the chair, and let your spine straighten and extend as you bend over from the hips. This is a modified version of Downward Dog pose.
4. **Inhale:** Step your left leg forward into a lunge position. *Optional:* Reach your arms up overhead.
5. **Exhale:** Step your left foot back to return to Downward Dog.
6. **Inhale:** Lean forward to straighten your body into a plank.
7. **Exhale:** Lower your heels and return to Downward dog.
8. **Inhale:** Step your right leg forward into a lunge position. *Optional:* Reach your arms up overhead.
9. **Exhale:** Step your right foot back to return to Downward dog.
10. **Inhale:** Stand up tall and reach your arms up overhead.
11. **Exhale:** Bring your hands together in front of your heart.



Repeat the sequence two to three times, then pause and notice the effects.

How do I find a yoga class?

Although it is best to go to classes in person to get live feedback and corrections from a certified instructor, the pandemic or even your headache may prevent you from going. Here are some ideas to try yoga at home:

- **Barrow Yoga Videos**

- **Miles for Migraine:** free yoga & mindfulness classes, meditations, and art therapy

- **Apps:** There are a lot of Apps available for yoga, meditation and breathwork. Below you can find a few we find helpful:

  - Juva for Migraine
  - Insight Timer
  - Headspace

- **In person:** Once you feel confident to go to an in-person class, it is good to check out your local yoga studio or recreation center for their current class schedule. Start out slow with beginner classes and gradually work on progressing to more advanced classes.

  Tip: Try out different classes to find the teacher and class style that suits you the best.