

Migraines are only recently being understood by science. Certainly many people discover triggers that bring on their migraines, however, it seems the triggers may be simply a final step in a process. If we can stop the entire process of happening, migraine sufferers will get better results.

Migraines have been a companion of mine for a long, long time. I've tried many solutions over the years and many things seem to do a bit of good, so that the results add up. I've gone from enduring a week of migraine every month to migraines lasting only 36 hours a month, and now, often I don't get them at all.

Yoga has been an important part of that strategy. There are certain poses that help over the long term. And I've found a breathing theme that provides almost instant relief. Here's how it goes:

The migraine process seems to start with a build up of too much oxygen in a certain part of the brain. This build up then triggers the blood vessels to tighten up, (to try reduce the excess build up of that oxygen), but the body over-reacts, tightens up too much, and then, to make up for *that*, the blood vessels widen. They widen too much and the headache begins in earnest. This is then made worse with secondary reactions through the body, such as muscles in the head and neck tightening up.

Yoga can help with the early stage of a migraine by helping you rebalance the oxygen in your body. Stretching will help draw blood supply toward muscles and away from the brain. Certain poses will help rebalance your hormones and your digestion. Stretching can also help relax muscles that are reacting to the headache, and help the sufferer let go enough to ease the secondary symptoms. Using the right breathing theme will also help rebalance the oxygen.

So do this routine when you first feel the migraine coming on - when you get the visual disturbances, or first start feeling nauseous or whatever you have come to realize are your early symptoms:

1. Choose some stretches that are fairly demanding for you and that make you feel good. You might especially like to try twists, if you can do them, or postures that help your neck and shoulders, as tension in these areas might be helping trigger your headache. Pick at least 2 stretches. This should take you about 5 minutes. (6 stretches done over 15 minutes would be ideal.)

2. As you do the stretches:

- ? Take long slow breaths out
- ? Then take shallow breaths in, about 2/3 full
- ? Do not hold your breath after you've breathed in.
- ? When you breathe out take all the time in the world to breathe out and stretch more and more as you do so.
- ? Then, before you breathe in, pause for as long as you can comfortably do so.

The idea here is to encourage less oxygen intake and give your body time to build up CO₂ before getting more fresh air with the next breath.

I find almost instant relief using this *Breathing Theme*. If you stick with it for about 5 minutes, the relief can last for hours. Later in the day, or as you feel the symptoms sneaking back, take another 5 minute yoga break to do this again.

Poses to Help Headaches

Really, any good stretch can be used with the *Breathing Theme*. However, in yoga, there are traditionally some stretches that are known to especially benefit headaches. Try these only if they are appropriate for you.

Not all poses can be done by everybody. See our Caveats page and the caveats that are on each posture page. Pregnant women should not do the abdominal lifts or twists. Pregnant women and women having their period should not do inverted poses.

Stretch	Benefit
Abdominal Lifts	Great during a headache. Possibly because they involve holding your breath.
Twists, like Twist 1 , Wide Angle with Twist, Twisted Side Stretch, Twisted Cobra , and Twisted Warrior	Help relieve tension in the spine and body and can re-balance digestion. Good during a headache for some people. Others find that, by including twists in their daily routine, it helps them avoid headaches or lessens their intensity.
Inverted Poses like Shoulder Stands and Head Stands	Relieve tension in the body and rebalance hormones and digestion. Try including them in your daily routine to help you reduce the number or intensity of headaches.
Sun Salutations	Good overall work out that can be made as intense or as gentle as you like. Removes tension from the entire body, rebalances blood flow.