

HEALING HEADACHES

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Certain yoga postures are beneficial for certain kinds of headaches. The sinuses, for example, which are often a cause of headaches, may be greatly benefited by *Sirshasana*, the Headstand.

Headaches caused by impurities in the blood may be overcome by deep yoga breathing, feeling the air coming up close to the brain, cooling it. *Sitali Pranayama*, taught in this lesson, may also prove helpful in such cases.

Many headaches are due to pressure on the nerves in the neck. A chiropractic adjustment may sometimes be indicated, but a variety of yoga postures may serve the purpose as well. Specifically recommended would be: *Halasana* (the Plow Pose); *Sarvangasana* (the Shoulder Stand); *Bhujangasana* (the Cobra Pose); *Chakrasana* (the Circle Pose); *Matsyasana* (the Fish Pose); *Supta-Vajrasana* (the Supine Firm Pose); and the first position of *Sasamgasana* (the Hare Pose).

It may help you to stimulate energy in the brain by rapping the skull all over with the knuckles, drawing energy mentally from the medulla oblongata. You may also rub the scalp briskly, stirring up energy in the cells while affirming, “*Awake, my sleeping children, wake!*”

Yogis say that long hair draws more energy to the brain. They describe the body as an inverted tree of which the spine is the trunk, the nervous system the branches, and the hair the roots. This is why many yogis let their hair grow long. When I was in India, I allowed my hair to grow until finally it reached halfway down my back. I discovered with long hair that I was subject to fewer headaches than I had been before.

There are pressure points on the skull that can be felt, subjectively, on the sides of the head, in the forehead, and at the back of the skull. On the sides, these points are located about an inch above the ears. In the forehead, the pressure point is in the middle of the forehead. In the back, it is about an inch above the depression at the base of the skull. If you can help someone to find these pressure points on your head, and to press inward upon them with the heels of his palms (or with his fingers), he may help you to overcome certain headaches. He should feel, as he presses, that he is forcing the pain up through the top of the head and out of your body.

Sometimes, in meditation, the practicing yogi feels an uncomfortable pressure in the brain. It may be only at the point between the eyebrows, or it may extend through the whole cerebrum. If at the point between the eyebrows, the pressure is probably due to a tendency to “think” with the body. You will notice how some people frown when they concentrate. Some people, similarly, tend to strain physically in meditation, whether by actually frowning, or merely by pushing the energy with a certain mental tension toward the point between the eyebrows. Many headaches are in fact caused by the tension resulting from this tendency to “think” with the body. They can be overcome by a deliberate effort to relax mentally. Thought is much clearer in a relaxed than in a strained state of mind. Instead of driving the energy forcibly to the point between the eyebrows in meditation, simply feel that all your thoughts and perceptions originate there, or refer them repeatedly to that point. *Absorption, not strain, must be the keynote of all meditative effort.* Yet it must be added that a feeling of pressure at the point between the eyebrows is not necessarily always bad. Sometimes it is simply a result of focusing one’s energy at that point, without tension, and may even help to concentrate there more deeply.

Sometimes the feeling of pressure can extend through the entire brain. In such cases, strain may not be the only cause. Too much reading, intellectual work, or even meditation without proper physical exercise may sometimes be a cause. Excessive sex dissipation, or too many thoughts in this direction, are also a common cause. Remedies include some of the practices that I have outlined above, notably deep, slow breathing. An excellent breathing exercise for this particular difficulty is to stand out of doors, if possible facing the wind. Practice double breathing: Inhale short and long through the nose, then exhale short and long through the mouth and nose. As you inhale, bring the hands in to the chest; as you exhale, extend the arms out in front to their full length, palms downward. Rest between the breaths as long as it is comfortable to do so, concentrating your mind and your gaze at the point between the eyebrows. Repeat this exercise several times.

Almond oil is an excellent remedy for this general pressure in the brain. The oil may be rubbed into the scalp. If the condition is serious, wash the hair every night and rub almond oil into the scalp. (You may need to protect your pillow with a towel.) Almonds are good for the entire nervous system. They may be eaten whole, or ground up in a blender with a little lime juice, honey, and water.



If the pressure is too strong, meditate less for some days, and do not meditate late at night. Wear a hat in the sun, and try, if possible, to avoid deep thinking. Avoid reading and problem solving. Simply divert the mind until the pressure diminishes. Physical exercise out-of-doors will be invaluable at such times, especially if you can get down to the seashore or up into the mountains. Indeed, it is astonishing how clear the brain of the city dweller may become when he gets off to the open countryside even for half a day.

Another practice may prove helpful in case of pressure in the brain: Sit in *Vajrasana*. Clench the fists, and put them in the stomach at about the level of the navel. Bend forward in *Sasamgasana*, resting your head on the floor, and remain in this position for at least a minute.

Headaches are often caused by alimentary disturbances such as constipation. The stomach should be kept clear and functioning well for the sake, not only of the stomach, but of the head and of the whole body.

☞ *The Art and Science of Raja Yoga, Step Eleven: Healing* ☞