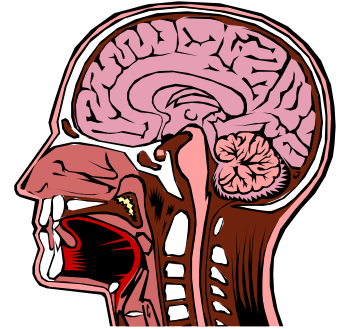


Headaches and Neck Pain

Information Sheet

Causes

Headaches are most commonly caused by muscle tension of the neck, shoulders and head. This muscle tension is generally due to either physical strain and poor posture (e.g. working on a keyboard all day at work) or mental and emotional stress, which is held in the neck and shoulders. Muscles tension causes headaches by constricting the blood vessels supplying the brain and hence depriving the brain cells of oxygen, glucose and water.



Headaches are a sign that there is an imbalance in the body and can also be caused by meridian imbalances, cervical misalignment, constipation, dietary imbalances and food allergies.

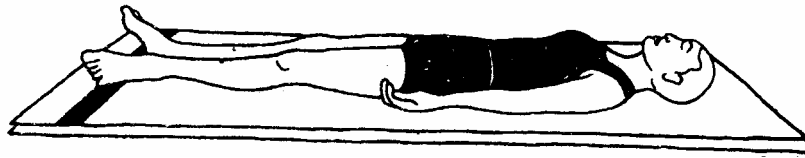
It's a good idea to see your GP if the headaches are severe or persistent since it could be a sign of something more serious such as a brain tumor or ear infection.

What you can do

Quick Neck Releases: (These can be done sitting in a chair, kneeling or crossed legged.) These are most effective if done gently and easily. If you feel pain or discomfort, it is a signal to not go any further.

- ◆ Turn head one-way and eyes the opposite way.
- ◆ Turn head and shoulders together, and then take the head in the opposite direction. Hold your shoulders to one side and float your head shoulder to shoulder.
- ◆ Tuck the chin into the chest as you breathe out and look up to the ceiling as you breathe in. Then include your chest into the movement, so that as you look to the ceiling you push your chest out and when you tuck your chin into your chest you slouch. You could try taking your eyes the opposite way here also.
- ◆ Sternocleidomastoid release: take your ear toward your shoulder, keeping the head on straight (looking forward, not twisting to the side), go side to side about 10 times. If you don't feel the stretch then tuck your chin in. Then hold to one side and lift the shoulder up and down in the direction of your ear a few times. Swap sides.

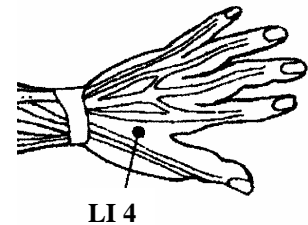
Postures: Shavasana is probably the most effective pose to assume when experiencing headaches. It calms the nervous system, and takes pressure off the spine and particularly the neck. Focus on the breath in the belly while in the posture.



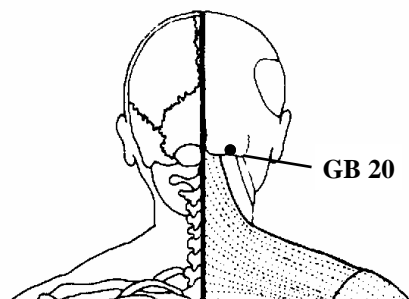
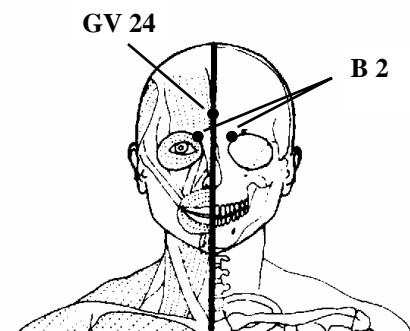
Relaxation: Any form of relaxation is beneficial for headaches, especially Yoga Nidra Meditation. This involves sequentially rotating one's awareness around the body, bringing the attention to the different body parts. ASK YOUR INSTRUCTOR ABOUT A YOGA NIDRA CD.

Acupoints: Press the following points for 10 seconds, 3 times while breathing down into your belly.

- **LI 4** (in the webbing of the hand where the thumb and forefinger meet). This may be useful if the headache is due to digestive dysfunction. *NOTE: Not to be used during pregnancy.*



- **B 2** (inside of eyebrow, where there is a small indentation).
- **GV 24** (the third eye point in between the eyebrows).
- **St 3** (press up and under the cheek bone at the level of the nose).
- **GB 20** (press up and under the skull).



Just massaging the head (particularly up and under the base of the skull, face, eyes and temples) and neck with the fingertips can help as well.

Breathing Techniques:

Specific breathing techniques assist with headaches by reducing stress and tension and by increasing the oxygen content of the blood and hence the brain. They should only be practiced for a maximum of 5 minutes and correct instruction from your teacher is necessary first.

- Ujjayi Pranayama
- Nadi Shodana (Alternate Nostril Breathing)
- Aware of breath at the nostrils. Check which nostril is open, then lie down on that side so as to change the flow of breath to the other nostril (this is particularly good for migraines).
- Bhramari (Humming Bee Breath)



Other things you could try:

- ◆ Visit a Naturopath (allergies and diet), Chiropractor, Osteopath or Masseur.
- ◆ Lie in the Alexander position for 5 - 20 minutes (semi-supine with a book under your head).
- ◆ Splash your eyes with cold water regularly and do gentle eye exercises.
- ◆ Jala Neti (ask your instructor)
- ◆ Change what you do at work, or try to bring more awareness to your movements.

This is a summary sheet, which you can use at home to help free up your neck and relieve headaches. Due to lack of space detail is omitted, so some things may not be clear. If you haven't done the exercises in class or are still unsure in any way, please feel free to ask your instructor for help in doing the postures and releases, finding the acupressure points and anything else you would like to know.

This sheet gives you some options, so experiment a little and then stick with the practices that help you the most and which you can incorporate into your life with ease.