

# yoga remedies

FOR EVERY DAY AILMENTS

HEADACHES | EYESTRAIN | COLDS & FLU

WRIST STRAIN | INSOMNIA | BACK PAIN

STRESS | DEPRESSION

FROM THE EDITORS OF

**yoga**  
JOURNAL

Welcome to *Yoga Journal's* "Yoga Remedies." In this booklet, you'll learn how to do yoga postures for eight common health problems. Yoga, which means "union," helps join body and mind in a way that reconnects us with our needs and fosters total well-being. In addition, numerous studies have shown that yoga measurably affects the nervous, musculoskeletal, circulatory, and endocrine systems of the body. Using specific postures, we can take charge of our well-being, tapping into our body's wisdom to heal what ails us. Yoga also builds strength, flexibility, and balance without the risk of injury common to high-impact sports and fitness activities.

Yoga's influence on our health is garnering increased recognition in mainstream medicine circles. Studies by Herbert Benson, M.D., at Harvard Medical School, and Jon Kabat-Zinn, M.D., at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, have conclusively shown that yoga and meditation boost immunity and reduce stress, an underlying factor in many chronic illnesses, including heart disease and cancer. Prestigious hospitals, such as Memorial Sloan-Kettering and Columbia Presbyterian in New York City, and HMOs, such as Kaiser Permanente, now offer yoga classes to their patients—powerful proof that yoga works.

Whether you're new to yoga or looking for ways to expand your practice, we hope that these tips give you the tools you need to stay well. Enjoy them in good health.

Namaste!

The Editors of *Yoga Journal*

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(Cobra Pose)

# Bhujangasana



## POSE INSTRUCTIONS

Lying flat on your belly, bring your hands under your shoulders with your forehead touching the floor. Hug your elbows back and into your body. Activate the legs by pointing your toes away from you and pressing the tops of your feet into the floor. Press your pubic bone into the floor. On an inhalation, slowly lift your chest off the floor using the strength of your back rather than the force of your hands. After a few breaths, release to the floor on an exhalation.

If you suffer from carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), the idea of subjecting your aching wrists to the rigors of yoga might seem out of the question. But according to a number of yoga experts, the practice can offer just the healing you need.

A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* has given credence to the idea that certain asanas can facilitate wrist rejuvenation. The research tracked 42 people with CTS who practiced a yoga-based regimen twice weekly for two months, comprised of 11 postures targeting upper-body joints, followed by relaxation. Compared to a control group who did not practice yoga, the yoga group ultimately demonstrated better grip strength and reported a reduction in pain.

Sandy Blaine, a yoga instructor who runs CTS preventive yoga workshops in the San Francisco Bay Area, says that combating mild to moderate CTS symptoms is primarily a matter of “counteracting the repetitive movements that created them. That means stretching out the upper back, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, and wrists.” She recommends spending 30 minutes a day stretching out those areas, ideally in two 15-minute segments.

CTS healing really comes down to two key factors, adds Judith Lasater, Ph.D., a physical therapist and San Francisco-based Iyengar Yoga instructor—awareness and postural alignment. “All types of yoga are centered on teaching students to be aware of their posture, breathing, and thoughts. This helps increase awareness of postural habits, which can contribute to injury. And learning specifically how to sit, how to lift, and how to stretch during breaks can also be very useful. For this, yoga is the perfect teacher.”—Angela Pirisi

#### OTHER RECOMMENDED POSES

TADASANA (MOUNTAIN POSE)  
DHANURASANA (BOW POSE)  
GARUDASANA (EAGLE POSE)

(Corpse Pose)

## Savasana



### POSE INSTRUCTIONS

Lying on your back, close your eyes, and rest your arms comfortably at your sides, palms facing up. Let your feet naturally turn out. Feel the weight of your head, shoulders, back, pelvis, and legs sink into the ground. Take a few deep abdominal breaths to release tension, then resume normal breathing, relaxing into the pose. After resting as long as 20 minutes, slowly roll over to your right side and use your arms to push yourself up.

Blurry vision and stinging, dry eyes are often the price you pay for using a computer—and the longer you stare at the screen, the worse these symptoms get. In fact, a recent study showed that nearly 90 percent of employees who work with computers for more than three hours a day suffer from some form of eye trouble. Vision complaints associated with computer use have become so widespread that experts now recognize the problem as “computer vision syndrome,” or CVS.

While CVS has not yet been shown to damage vision, there is no need to put up with its uncomfortable symptoms. San Francisco yoga instructor Judith Lasater, Ph.D., recommends adjusting the computer so that the eyes rest at the level just below the tips of the ears. This will put the head in a more relaxed, comfortable position. She also advises to pull your shoulder blades down, “like tucking in a shirt,” for a straight back and open chest. Taking frequent breaks from the computer, using eye drops, and dimming your office lights are other easy solutions that work, advises Kent M. Daum, O.D., Ph.D., of the University of Alabama, Birmingham.

To release overall tension (which contributes to eye distress), Lasater suggests a version of Savasana (Corpse Pose) tailored for the eyes. Lie down in Savasana with a stack of several books lying on the floor by the top of your head. Place either a five-pound bag of rice or some sandbags halfway on the books and halfway on your forehead. Rest for 15 minutes. This will help the muscles in the head area to loosen and relax.—*Anna Soref*

## OTHER RECOMMENDED EXERCISES

### PALMING

REST WITH THE PALMS CUPPING THE EYES TO CREATE COMPLETE DARKNESS.

### MASSAGE

RUB YOUR FINGERS UP THE BRIDGE OF YOUR NOSE, ACROSS THE EYEBROWS TO THE TEMPLES. THEN RUB YOUR FINGERS FROM YOUR NOSE TO THE CHEEKBONES AND EARS. FINALLY, RUB YOUR FINGERS ACROSS YOUR FOREHEAD.

(Standing Forward Bend)

## Uttanasana



### POSE INSTRUCTIONS

Stand in Tadasana (Mountain Pose) with feet hip-width apart. Bend forward, keeping your knees straight and legs strong. Place hands behind the ankles, calves, or knees, according to your level of comfort and flexibility. If your hamstrings are tight, bend the knees slightly so as not to strain your back. Hold for 1 to 2 minutes and come back up.

Think of this as your wake-up call. Fewer than half of all Americans sleep long enough or well enough, according to the National Sleep Foundation. So many of us complain of fitful sleep, insomnia, and workday drowsiness that William Dement, M.D., Ph.D., author of *The Promise of Sleep* (Delacorte, 1999), warns of a “national emergency.” Sleep deprivation depresses the immune system, increases irritability, and slows reaction time, increasing the likelihood of car crashes and other accidents. Even worse, a recent study confirmed that losing sleep actually accelerates the aging process.

While we often deprive ourselves of adequate sleep by simply trying to fit too much in a day, insomnia is another major contributor to the sleep crisis. If you find falling asleep a problem, then stress is the likely culprit, and an active yoga routine during the day might be the answer. “Regular asana practice can squeeze out the tension,” advises John Schumacher of Unity Woods Yoga Center near Washington, D.C. When it’s time for bed, try winding down with calming poses such as forward bends, twists, simple inversions (such as lying with your feet up on the wall), and gentle breathing.

Carol Dickman of Yoga Enterprises in New York recommends deep belly breathing. “Lying on your back with your eyes closed, gently place your hands on your belly,” she says. “Inhaling, feel your belly expand and rise up to the ceiling. As you exhale, feel it contract, visualizing your belly button coming closer to the spine.” And remember, the more easygoing the attitude you take to bed, the more likely you are to sleep well.—*Sally Eauclaire Osborne*

#### OTHER RECOMMENDED POSES

VIPARITA KARANI (LEGS-UP-THE-WALL POSE)

JATHARA PARIVARTANASANA (REVOLVED ABDOMEN POSE)

NADI SODHANA PRANAYAMA (ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING)

(Downward-Facing Dog)

## Adho Mukha Svanasana



### POSE INSTRUCTIONS

From a position of all fours on the floor, lift the buttocks up toward the ceiling on an exhalation. Elongate the spine, and straighten the knees as much as you can without forcing. Lift from the wrists and from the top front of the thighs closest to the hips. Move the abdominal muscles in and keep them firm; drop your head toward the floor and let it hang loosely. Release after 3 breaths.

Ever wonder why some of us fall constant prey to seasonal colds, while others waltz through winter without a sniffle? While it's tempting to fault the person on the bus who sneezed in your direction, compelling new research has some scientists arguing that colds aren't just a matter of viral exposure. Rather, an internal disturbance in your body's immune system is more likely to blame.

Yoga provides the perfect means of keeping the immune system strong on a day-to-day basis—and it can also help you gain strength when you fall ill. Asanas work by lowering stress hormones that compromise the immune system. They also condition the lungs and respiratory tract, stimulate the lymphatic system to oust toxins from the body, and bring oxygenated blood to the organs.

William Mitchell, N.D., of Bastyr University points to a number of gentle poses that can help a practitioner get through a cold. Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog), for instance, encourages blood flow to the sinuses. Ustrasana (Camel Pose), Gomukhasana (Cow Face Pose), and Balasana (Child's Pose) with arms extended in front, moving into Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose), are good choices if bronchial congestion has you struggling for air.

Rest assured that whatever your current yoga practice entails, it already strengthens your resistance to viral and bacterial intruders. But if you want to take extra steps to avoid infection, take this advice from Richard Rosen, instructor at Piedmont Yoga Studio in Oakland, California. He explains that modified versions of forward bends, backbends, and twists can all lend a hand in supporting and strengthening the immune system. Practice these regularly throughout the winter, and you'll better your chances at staying healthy.—*Angela Pirisi*

#### OTHER RECOMMENDED POSES

SALAMBA SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA (SUPPORTED BRIDGE POSE)

VIPARITA KARANI (LEGS-UP-THE-WALL POSE)

SALAMBA BADDHA KONASANA (SUPPORTED BOUND ANGLE POSE)

## HEADACHE

(Legs-up-the-Wall Pose)

# Viparita Karani



## POSE INSTRUCTIONS

With the back of the pelvis on a bolster placed 4 to 6 inches from the wall, swing the legs up the wall. Drop your sitting bones into the space between the blanket and the wall and open your arms out to the sides. If your hamstrings feel tight, try turning the legs slightly in, or move the bolster closer to the wall. Relax into the pose, holding for a minimum of 5 minutes.

If you're prone to headaches, you probably know some of the triggers (stress, lack of sleep, hunger) that cause them. But have you taken stock of your posture lately? Rounded shoulders, a curved upper back, and a head pitched slightly forward can all add up to muscle tension that results in head pain.

According to Tomas Brofeldt, M.D., at the University of California's Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, 75 percent of all headaches arise from muscle tension in the back of the neck, specifically the semispinalis capitis muscles, due to problems in posture. Because the muscles of the neck and upper back connect to the head, tension arising in these areas can be referred to the forehead and behind the eyes.

"Anything that distorts the spinal curves has the potential to cause headaches," explains Margaret Holiday, D.C., a chiropractor in Marin County, California. Because headaches arise so often from muscle tension, there is no substitute for a thorough, daily yoga program for treatment and prevention. Include poses in your practice that open the chest, such as Setu Bandha (Bridge Pose), and ones like Salamba Balasana (Supported Child's Pose) that stretch and relax the upper back and neck. Breathe deeply and slowly during all the postures, and remember to relax the forehead, eyes, jaw, and tongue.

When it comes to treatment, you'll have the best results if you start stretching and releasing at the first sign of a headache, before the muscles go into spasm. As for prevention, practicing yoga stretches every day will help foster a new awareness of your body's unique trouble areas—and, ultimately, reduce the amount of headaches you experience.— *Ellen Serber*

#### OTHER RECOMMENDED POSES

SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA (RECLINING BOUND ANGLE POSE)

ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA (DOWNWARD-FACING DOG)

SALAMBA ARDHA UTTANASANA (SUPPORTED HALF-STANDING FORWARD BEND)

STRESS

(Reclining Bound Angle Pose)

# Supta Baddha Konasana



## POSE INSTRUCTIONS

Set a block lengthwise on your mat, on its second-highest height. Place a bolster over the block so the block is centered underneath the top half of the bolster. Sit in front of the bottom half of the bolster with your sacrum touching its edge. Slowly lie back, then place the blankets under the outer thighs. Press the soles of the feet together and let the knees drop open onto the blankets. Make a blanket pillow for the head. Place a sandbag over the feet and an eye bag over the eyes, then bring your arms out to your sides, palms up. As you breathe, release the exhalations down the front of the spine and out toward the feet. Stay here for 10 to 45 minutes.

Mention stress and everyone groans. It seems we're all rushing around these days. As technology speeds up the pace of life and we try to fit more into our busy schedules, anxiety and worry edge out inner peace and contentment. The result? Instant mind/body reactions like irritability and fatigue—and possibly more serious health concerns down the road.

When faced with difficult situations, our bodies respond with a series of physical reactions that mobilize internal forces and ready us to act. But researchers warn of problems that this response, called "fight-or-flight," can cause when employed in excess. Explains Dr. Robert Eliot, former director of preventive and rehabilitative cardiology at St. Luke's Hospital in Phoenix, "When stress was primarily physical, people really did have to fight or flee. For the most part, modern stress is of a different nature, and we end up pumping high-energy chemicals for low-energy needs. The price is high; over the long haul you turn the energy inward and burn out."

While we can't control all that happens in life, we can work on our reaction to things that push our buttons. Because yoga helps reacquaint us with our emotional and physical needs, it provides an excellent means of stress prevention. Any regular yoga practice will ease anxiety, although Hawaii yoga instructor Gary Kraftsow, author of *Yoga for Wellness* (Penguin, 1999) suggests incorporating some stimulating postures such as Virabhadrasana (Warrior Pose) and Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose) to energize the body and build strength. Restorative poses also offer stress relief. Connecting with the rhythm of the breath while resting in Savasana (Corpse Pose) and Salamba Baddha Konasana (Supported Bound Angle Pose) will help both body and mind to deeply relax.—*Jennifer Barrett*

#### OTHER RECOMMENDED POSES

SALAMBA SETU BANDHA SARVANGASANA (SUPPORTED BRIDGE POSE)

VIPARITA KARANI (LEGS-UP-THE-WALL POSE)

JATHARA PARIVARTANASANA (REVOLVED ABDOMEN POSE)

(Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend)

## Prasarita Padottanasana



### POSE INSTRUCTIONS

Stand tall, with the feet parallel, 4 to 4 1/2 feet apart. The lower back should be neither flattened nor overarched. Rotating the pelvis over the hip joints, so the alignment of the spine doesn't change, place the hands on the floor. If your hamstrings are tight, you may have to place your hands on a chair or two blocks to avoid hinging in the lower back.

When it comes to back pain prevention, a consistent plan of regular stretching is your best bet. Yet as many well-intentioned people learn the hard way, the wrong kind of exercise can create or exacerbate pain, particularly if you have tight hamstrings and a flattened curve in the lower back. Since backaches often result from a tug-of-war between your abs and hamstrings, you can end up making matters worse if you target these areas carelessly.

Learning to stretch with good alignment and movement patterns now will help protect the back from injury in the future. Indeed, a well-constructed yoga routine can be an important first step in learning how to stretch safely. Poses like Prasarita Padottanasana (Wide-Legged Standing Forward Bend) give the spine an opportunity to lengthen horizontally while the hamstrings and inner thigh muscles lengthen vertically. Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana (Extended Hand-to-Big-Toe Pose) is another gentle option. This posture stretches the hamstrings while promoting a normal positioning of the lower back and pelvis.

Before beginning any yoga back care program, however, take the 90-degree test. Lie on your back with one leg stretched out flat on the floor. Stretch the other leg up to the ceiling with a straight knee. If you can't bring your leg to vertical (perpendicular to the floor), your pelvis will be posteriorly tilted in a sitting forward bend, and it's possible that you would strain your back muscles or injure a disk if you reached for your toes. It's best to avoid sitting forward bends for now and use other poses (like those mentioned above) that stretch the same areas more safely.—*Julie Gudmestad*

#### OTHER RECOMMENDED POSES

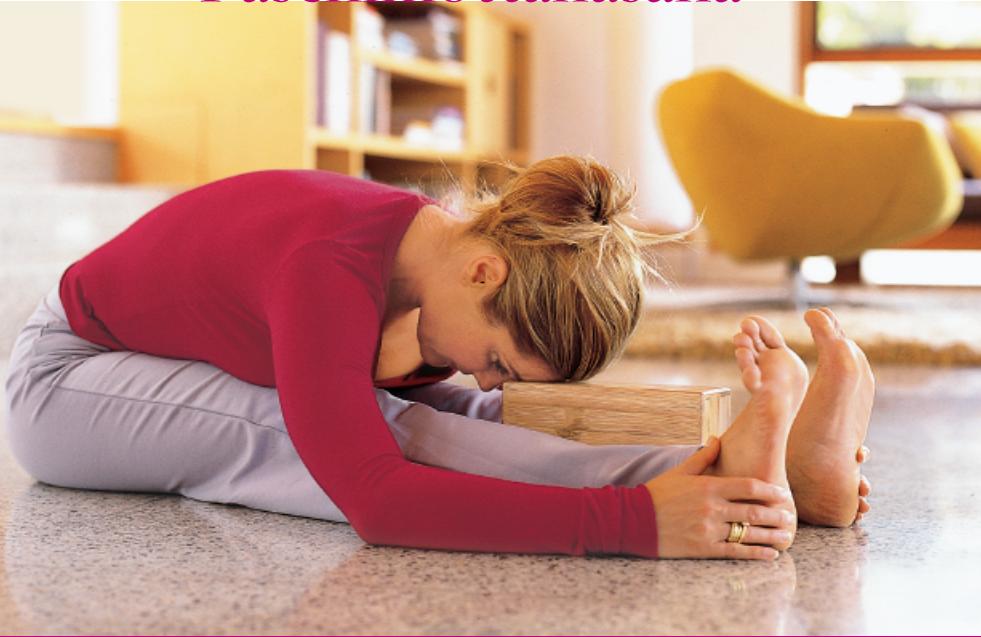
SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA (RECLINING BOUND ANGLE POSE)

SUPTA PADANGUSTHASANA (RECLINING HAND-TO-BIG-TOE POSE)

SAVASANA (CORPSE POSE)

(Seated Forward Bend)

## Paschimottanasana



### POSE INSTRUCTIONS

Sit on your mat with legs outstretched. Stretch the arms overhead and lengthen the spine. On an exhalation, reach the arms forward and rest the hands on the feet, calves, or knees, depending on your level of flexibility. Stay in the pose, inhale deeply, and on each successive exhalation, let the torso sink toward the legs. After several breaths, reach the arms forward on an inhale and come up to sitting.

While the ranks of Americans using Prozac and other antidepressants continues to grow (to the tune of \$44 billion in sales) many others facing depression are finding relief on the mat. As Stephen Cope, author of *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self* (Bantam, 1999), explains, “Yoga postures can penetrate what Wilhelm Reich, the founder of the science of bioenergetics, called ‘character armor,’ our unconsciously held patterns of physical contractions and defenses.”

Inverted postures work particularly well, says Dr. Karen Koffler, an internist who trained in the Integrative Medicine Program at the University of Arizona. They alter the blood flow, benefiting lymphatic drainage and the cranial sacral fluid. “And if there is increased blood flow to the head area,” she adds, “there will be increased bioavailability of oxygen and glucose—the two most important metabolic substrates for the brain.”

Patricia Walden, an international yoga teacher-trainer, recommends supported inversions as well as backbends for people suffering from a depression characterized by inertia or fatigue. For those experiencing anxiety, she advises a more active sequence, modified according to experience and physical energy level. Walden tells her depressed students to keep their eyes open wide while practicing, and to move from posture to posture without pausing in between, to generate life force and focus the mind on the body.

Because there are different types of depression, some poses and sequences will work better for you than others. Listen to the needs of your body and mind and make modifications accordingly. You will inevitably face difficult thoughts or feelings in your practice. Balance these with positive ones. As you create physical space within your poses, you’ll create space within your consciousness as well.

—Amy Weintraub

#### OTHER RECOMMENDED POSES

SALAMBA ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA (SUPPORTED DOWNWARD-FACING DOG)

VIPARITA DANDASANA (INVERTED STAFF POSE)

URDHVA DHANURASANA (UPWARD BOW POSE OR BACKBEND)