



The Path to Healing from Chronic Pain Through Yoga

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Pain and Suffering

Although the terms are commonly used interchangeably, “pain” and “suffering” are, in fact, two very different things. *Pain* is rooted in the physiological and has a distinct, discernible bodily causation, while *suffering* is how we *respond* to that pain. Judith Lasater describes suffering as “*the personalization we bring to our difficulties*” and when one’s difficulty is chronic pain, it seems many who suffer recurrent, intractable pain find themselves through typical medical intervention to be trapped in a predictable and often ineffectual cascade of pharmaceuticals and, then inevitably, an ever-escalating stress when a pharmacologic approach falls short of offering marked relief. In this report we will examine the links between stress and chronic pain and we will seek to understand how an integrated approach of asana, meditation, and pranayama might augment (or possibly even supplant) traditional medical approaches to chronic pain.

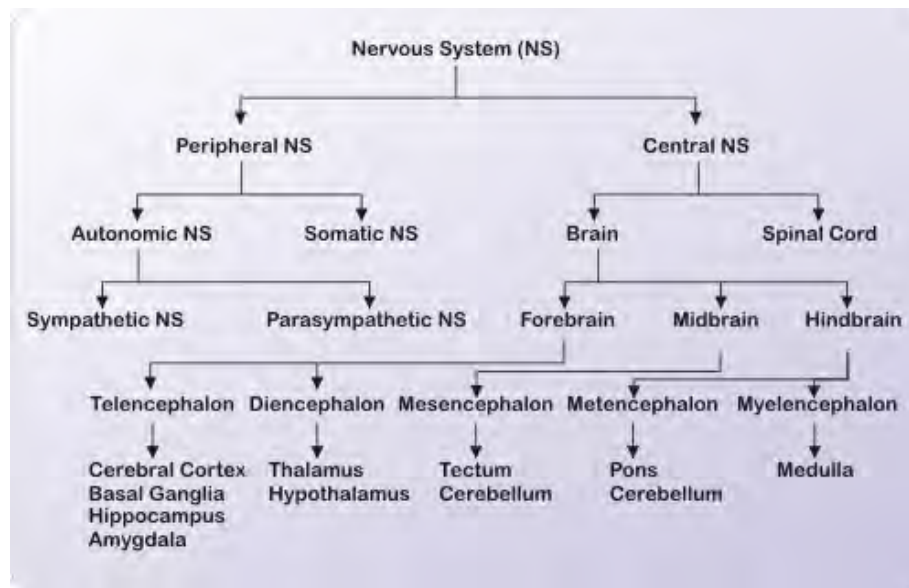
For the purpose of narrowing our efforts, I will focus specifically on **stress** and its relationship to the cycle of chronic migraine pain. We will look at ways in which yoga can be a supplement to a perhaps already established traditional medical plan to treat chronic pain, and ways in which a tailored and thoughtfully integrated yogic approach might one day perhaps even take the place of traditional medical/pharmacologic avenues. We will look at a 360 degree, comprehensive approach utilizing Asana, Pranayama, and Meditation as a means to not only treat but also possibly prevent or lessen by varying degrees the frequencies, symptoms, or duration of a migraine.

Chronic Migraine Pain

Chronic pain is defined as pain that lasts longer than 6 months. Of the types of chronic pain experienced, **migraine headaches** are listed among the most common. The root causes of migraines are not definitively known and may be as variable as those who suffer from them. Biologically, it is well-proven that there is a link between the dilation and constriction of blood vessels on the brain’s surface. Migraine is also widely believed to be a disorder of the Central Nervous System. To understand how the Central Nervous System could be implicated in chronic migraine pain, we need to understand how the body’s overall nervous system works.

The Intricate and Intuitive Role of the Nervous System

The Central Nervous System (CNS), the brain and spinal cord, and the Peripheral Nervous Systems (PNS), work together as the PNS carries information back and forth between the brain, our senses, and other parts of the body. The CNS, similar to a control center, depends on the information supplied by the PNS. The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), the part of the nervous system that controls involuntary or visceral body functions such as cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, among others, is a large part of what makes up the Peripheral Nervous System. To break it down even further, the ANS is made up of the Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Nervous Systems, as below:



The Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) and the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) are connected like a seesaw. When one is “up”, the other is “down”. Each plays a key role in the body’s ability to function under stress. When the body perceives a threat, a series of complicated and extremely rapid changes take place,

commonly referred to as the “flight or fight” response. Nerves in the skin, muscle, joints, and organs detect a threat and immediately notify the brain, which in turn sends alert signals to all major parts of the body by way of releasing stress hormones in an extraordinary effort to protect itself from harm. These various systems launch into action and do their synchronized dances in order to protect the body from further harm, discerning the magnitude of danger and acting appropriately.

When the threat or perceived threat is over, the Parasympathetic Nervous System in a healthy body is able to relax and allow for recovery. This is the case for acute, or rapid onset pain. In the context of chronic pain, however, the Parasympathetic Nervous System has far greater difficulty kicking in and allowing the body to rest. With chronic pain, the body has a learned response to be on high alert and, oftentimes, too high for too long. The brain begins to be conditioned to read pain signals unreliably and can cause the body to have a full-blown pain response when, in fact, such a high level response may not be needed at all. The mind and body become almost hypersensitive to the slightest hint of threat.

A remarkable occurrence takes place in the body known as **neuroplasticity**. Essentially, neuroplasticity is the brain’s ability to adapt and rewire. Think about learning an entirely new physical skill to which one’s body has never been exposed, such as kayaking. The body necessarily and fairly quickly learns to balance from a sitting position, learns the strokes to move forward, and learns how to turn the boat. The brain senses the danger of tipping the boat over and sends a rapid flurry of signals to the muscles to adjust for balance. Over time, the nervous system’s impossibly complex feedback mechanisms become skilled at recognizing the signs of tipping and new connections are made to allow the physical body to more efficiently move and to more quickly make increasingly adept and fine adjustments to prevent falling out of the boat. This is the beauty of neuroplasticity.

In the case of chronic pain, the nervous system is also learning and adapting; in essence, it is getting conditioned and accustomed to being in pain, which can then lead to a toxic cycle of rewiring the brain to detect and respond to even the slightest pain more quickly. New pathways and response patterns develop where a well-intentioned brain is, in response to pain, now venturing toward inappropriately hyper-reactivity of response. To further complicate things, chronic pain makes one more sensitive to not only physical pain but to emotional pain and stress as well. And whatever the body perceives as a threat, the Sympathetic Nervous System is ready for battle.

In Yoga, Neuroplasticity is known as Samskaras, Sanskrit for habit or pattern. We think of Samskaras as mental and physical grooves or patterns created over time as a result of life experiences. B.K.S. Iyengar, in *Light on Life*, describes Samskaras as mounds or sandbanks at the bottom of our lake of consciousness. Experiences, whether pleasurable or painful, create these sandbanks or grooves that deepen over time, and affect how we respond to present experiences. Samskaras, on a subtle level are stored reactions to injuries, pain, and emotional traumas. These imprinted experiences manifest in the physical body as coping mechanisms and habitual patterns, which can lead to continued suffering. These Samskaras can be particularly deep in the instance of chronic pain. So what can be done?

For one, we can change our *perception* of pain to break the cycle of suffering. Just as the body has the ability to rewire and adapt to pain and thereby, suffering, it can also rewire in a positive manner, as in the example of learning a new skill, by establishing new and building upon healthy patterns. Therefore, we can look to the physical postures of yoga to release stored tensions and habitual patterns to free ourselves and begin to form healthy and positive Samskaras, We can also incorporate restorative breathwork and meditation to stimulate the Parasympathetic Nervous System as a way of balancing the seesaw.

With **Asana, Pranayama, and Meditation**, yoga offers a potentially powerfully integrated toolkit for striking this delicate balance. Similar to the concept that sleep comes more easily and is more restful when the body has had a healthy amount of exercise and rest, it has been documented that an active asana practice followed by restorative postures may lead to deeper levels of relaxation, thereby bringing the body into a healthier and more balanced state. The following sequences were built with this concept in mind. We look to challenge the body, balancing effort with ease, ultimately, bringing the body to a state of calm. Following this course with intelligence, based upon the student's state of health, is key. If symptoms escalate, then more restorative postures are suggested as noted in the specific sequences.

Using Asana and Pranayama to Bring Equanimity to the Autonomic Nervous System

Case Study

My student (due to her age, her name will remain confidential) is a 17 year old girl who has suffered for many years with chronic migraine headaches. She describes them as rapid onset, with an aching pain originating in the back of her head, specifically the occipital region. As the migraine settles in, the pain will radiate down her entire cervical spine. Sometimes she will experience the typical “aura” that is associated with migraines, but more often will not. She finds that by lying still in a darkened room, she can sometimes blunt the migraine from escalating. When she experiences full-blown symptoms, it is painful to turn her head from side to side. While she describes the symptoms in a staged manner, she also indicates that she has mild symptoms constantly. She truly can’t remember when she didn’t experience at least a mild headache. She has taken a battery of tests to rule out more serious diagnosis and has taken an arsenal of prescription medication as well as injections to find relief. She is currently finding some relief in the duration and frequency of full-blown attacks, but not fully.

My suggested stepped approach for my student involves:

- Proactively maintaining levels of well-being when she is feeling her best
- Recognizing and acting appropriately when she first senses migraine onset
- Managing symptoms when a migraine has escalated or during a rapid onset
- Nurturing her body as she is recovering from an episode in order to bring her back quickly to a state of balanced health

In each of these stages our goal is to keep her feeling her optimal, lessening the degree and/or frequency of, or potentially altering the course of her migraine altogether, thereby breaking the chronic cycle of pain.

*Following is a program that she can draw from
within each stage of migraine:*

Asana Sequence to Maintain Well-Being

Virasana **Centering**
 Warm shoulders and wrists (arms out/up + gomukhasana)
 Suggested Pranayama: Ujayii
Hands/knees stretch legs out with intention
AMS
Plank > AMS > plank vinyasa
Anjaneyasana rt/left
Ardha Uttanasana
Uttanasana
Tadasana
Surya Namaskar A x4 (with modifications based on student abilities)
Anjaneyasana (revolved for twist)
AMS
 Come to hands/knees
Bhujangasana
Salabhasana
Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (bridge)
Urdhva Danurasana
Supported Bridge w/block
Supta Padangusthasana
Gentle twist side to side
Savasana – 10 minutes

Asana Sequence for Mild Symptoms

Sukhasana **Centering**
 Suggested Pranayama: Sitali/Sithari
Adho mukha virasana w/ side stretch.
Cakarvakasana – link movement with ujayii breath
AMS
Tadasana
Urdhva Hastasana
Uttansana (supporting head on block)
Trikonasana (do not turn head, gaze ahead)
Ardha Chandrasana (gaze straight ahead)
AMS
Low lunge rt/left
AMS
Dandasana
Janu Sirsasana (supported like Stonehenge) rt/left
Upavista Konasana
Baddha Konasana
Vipariti Karani
Savasana – minimum 15 minutes

Asana Sequence for Escalating Symptoms

Supta Baddha Konasana – 5-8 minutes

Dandasana

Gentle cat/cow – with intention and following breath

AMS – supporting head with a block – 1 min

Low lunge (deep to allow total relaxation, allow head and neck to hang to release gripping tension in body)

Adho mukha virasana focus on side stretch and side twists

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana – fully supported in restorative
– 5 – 8 min

Jathara Parivartanasana w/ knees bent and supported.
– 3 min each side.

Supported balasana – 3 min – turn head, 3 min more.

Savasana – 10 minutes

Asana Sequence for Full Blown Symptoms

Supported supine position – centering

Suggested Pranayama: Belly breathing – 10 min

Sukhasana, forward fold, head resting in arms supported on chair – fully supported in Stonehenge style. 5 minutes then turn face and 5 more.

Vipariti Karani – 5 minutes

Yoga Nidra Meditation – 30 minutes

Savasana – 10 minutes

Asana Sequence for Recovery

Sukhasana – centering

Suggested Pranayama: Ujjayi

Cakarvakasana – link movement with ujjayi breath

Adho mukha virasana w/ deep side stretch

AMS

Vinyasa: AMS > plank > **Urdhva mukha svanasana** > AMS (repeat as often as feels good)

Ardha Uttanasana

Tadasana

Prasarita padottanasana

Parsvakonasana

Malasana

Maricyasana 3

Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (bridge) with block support

Supta padangustasana

Savasana – 15 minutes

An Exploration in Asana

This stepped approach takes into consideration the various stages of my students migraine and explores the opportunities at each stage to intercede and hopefully stop the migraine from escalating.

The first asana sequence is for maintaining a state of well-being. A healthy body is one which gets an adequate amount of exercise and rest. Chronic pain and depression can often go hand in hand, and there is an inherent fear of the future because of the always present concern that pain will return. In the first sequence, I had my student work toward Urdvha Danurasana, a wonderful pose to *counteract* anxiety and depression. This deep backbend opens the heart chakra which fosters a sense of self-worth and positive outlook on the future. If a student is not ready for the full Urdvha Danurasana, then Setu Bandha Sarvangasana will serve the same purpose.

In the next sequence, for Mild Symptoms, I still felt it was relevant and important to have an active practice, but with a little more focus on the *restorative* aspect. The focus is to quiet the mind with intermittent active postures. I suggest gaze be kept straight ahead in standing postures so as to not aggravate the neck muscles. Those with chronic pain frequently feel a sense of helplessness and being at the mercy of either their pain or doctors or their medication. Understanding this, I included Ardha Chandrasana. This posture gives the student a sense of accomplishment as well as an opening of the entire body to the possibilities of a healthy future. Throughout the sequence the use of blocks and bolsters will fully support the head or body for a complete relaxation of the muscles. We finish with Vipariti Karani and Savasana for a full 15 minutes.

The sequence for Escalating Symptoms and Full Blown Symptoms all predominately work toward bringing the student back to a state of well being by working toward quieting the Sympathetic Nervous System and stimulating the Parasympathetic Nervous System. The asana practice shortens and is replaced with longer hold times in the restorative postures as well as increased time spent in meditation.

The sequence for Recovery focuses on adding more movement back into one's practice via gentle vinyasa. I would caution the student to do these movements slowly and with intention to ease the body in its transition back to a state of wellness. Special attention was taken in creating a sequence that would lengthen

and stretch the spine and open the hip area to counter-balance the effect on the body of being in a more static or fetal position during the more intense stages of migraine.

In all of these sequences, I recommend the use of an eye pillow during Savasana and any supine centering or meditation. Judith Hanson Lasater describes the physiological response to having weight on the eyes as the body's message to "release and relax"; wholly appropriate, and likely even necessary if one is to realize the maximal benefit to these sequences.

A common thread within all of these sequences is the framework to take charge of one's own health. There is a sense of helplessness which comes with chronic pain, and a key to positively changing that relationship with *pain* and thereby lessening the *suffering* associated with the pain, is to have an active voice in one's own healthcare and to have appropriate and thoughtful tools to draw upon when feeling the most helpless. An individual might, for long stretches of their life, realize that pain could be inevitable, that a migraine may in fact be physiologically unavoidable, but - they may also be newly optimistic and possibly comforted and motivated to now have an integrated plan to draw from to ease symptoms and end the suffering of the moment.

Yoga allows for a very personal journey and exploration. These sequences will likely not work for everyone suffering from chronic pain. The idea is to try. To engage in the practice and see where it takes you. This is a journey of self-realization and understanding. Above all: to have compassion for one's body and to honor its remarkable healing abilities.

A Visual Guide to the Restorative Postures



Supta Baddha Konasana

Reclined Cobbler's Pose



Adho Mukha Virasana

Supported Child's Pose



Adho Mukha Sukhasana

Fully supported forward fold Sukhasana



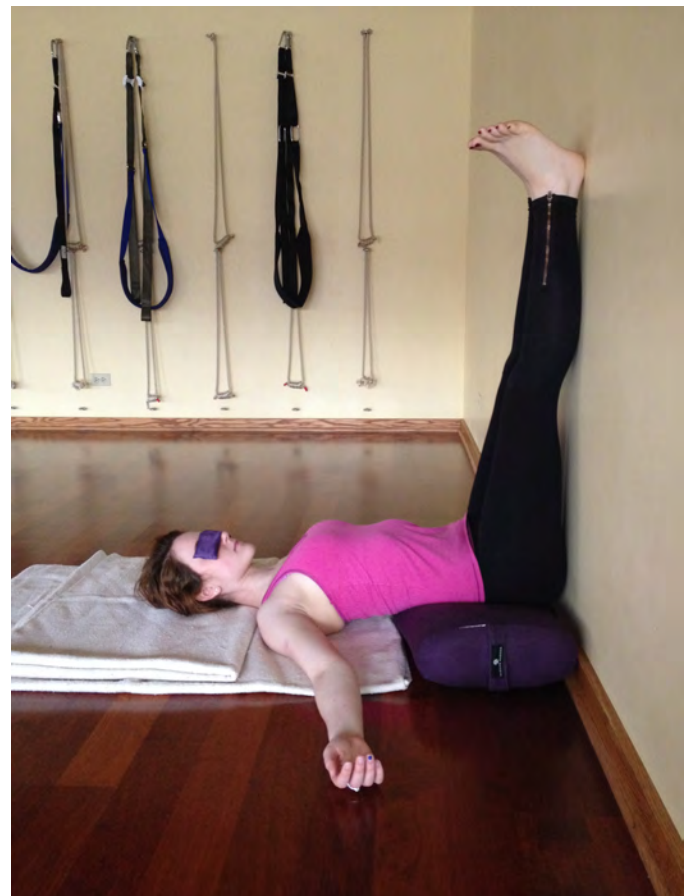
Setu Bandha Sarvangasana

Fully supported Bridge Pose



Salamba Sarvangasana

Supported Shoulderstand



Viparita Karani

Legs up the Wall

Using Pranayama as a Means to Heal the Body

“Our breath is constantly rising and falling, ebbing and flowing, entering and leaving our bodies. Full body breathing is an extraordinary symphony of both powerful and subtle movements that massage our internal organs, oscillate our joints, and alternately tone and release all the muscles of the body.

It is a full participation in life.”

Donna Fahri

Pranayama is the 4th limb in the 8 Limbs of Yoga. It is defined, according to the sutras, as *“the regulation of the incoming and outgoing flow of breath with retention”*. Those with chronic pain can experience breath that gets “stuck”, shallow, or a general shortness of breath. The simple act of noticing your breath and your breath patterns, and consciously slowing and steadying the breath can bring the body into a state of stillness. With that stillness, comes a feeling of relaxation, which in turn sends signals to the bodies nervous system that everything is ok. Just like a stressful event can cause a landslide of events that kick the sympathetic nervous system into high alert, by consciously relaxing the breath you can bring about a cascade of positive changes that lead to a state of wellness. Another advantage of pranayama is that it can be practiced nearly anywhere and at anytime. Although breathing is an involuntary action of the Autonomic Nervous System, we yet have the ability to mindfully control breath as another key in breaking the cycle of chronic pain. Ultimately, breaking free of that cycle of pain leads to a life fully lived.

Following are suggestions on methods of pranayama for the various stages of migraines.

Pranayama to Maintain Well-Being and Recovery - Ujjayi

Produces a calming effect on the mind and nerves.
Focuses attention.
Stimulates thyroid gland in the throat which helps to regulate metabolism.
As you focus your attention on the sound created, you still the mind.

Instructions:

Sit comfortably, lift chest, slide shoulder blades down the back.
Take a normal inhalation/exhalation.
Inhale through the nose, then exhale through the mouth making a “Hhh” sound as though you were fogging a mirror.
Inhale through the nose, then exhale using the same “Hhh” sound, this time with your mouth closed, through the nostrils.

Pranayama for Mild Symptoms - Sitali/Sithari

Cools the system.
Soothes the eyes and ears.
Activates the liver and spleen and improves digestion.

Instructions:

Sit comfortably, close eyes, and breath normally.
Inhale slowly through a protruding tongue curled into a tube (sitali).
Feel the coolness of the breath in the mouth and throat.
Relax the tongue, close the lips and exhale through the nose.
Continue for 5-10 minutes.
Variation: add head movement by slowly lifting chin as you inhale and releasing head back to center as you exhale.
Alternate technique: Sitkari: place the tongue behind the upper teeth with lips peeled away from teeth.

Pranayama for Escalating Symptoms – Anapana

Anapana is a simple awareness of the breath.

Instruction:

Lie in a reclined position, knees bent, feet planted in line with hips, inner knees touching.
Close eyes and mouth and breathe through the nose.
Simply observe the breath entering through your nostrils and filling your torso.
Notice how the breath moves through your body, if it gets stuck anywhere.

Notice if your breath is shallow or deep, smooth or choppy.

Pranayama for Full Blown Symptoms - Belly Breathing

Helps to regain our natural breath pattern.

Focusing on relaxing the belly, we are able to surrender to the wave of breath.

Instructions:

Relax in supine position, knees bent, feet planted in line with hips, knees touching. The sacrum should be level and in complete contact with the floor.

Place both palms on the low belly, fingertips touching. Relax elbows.

Soften and relax the belly completely.

Exhale completely.

As you inhale, place your awareness in the belly as it swells into the palm of your hands, like an expanding balloon.

As you exhale, allow your belly to hollow toward your spine.

Continue breathing, allowing the belly to receive and release the breath without effort.

Find your calm, relaxed, and natural rhythm.

Set-up Postures for Supine Pranayama & Meditation



The Student's Experience

In our first session, because she was feeling well and had been for several days, we practiced the Well-Being Sequence. I initially gave her the pranayamas Kapalabhati and Sitari to work with. We practiced these together. I explained that Kapalabhati was only to be done when she wasn't having any symptoms to maintain her level of energy and help to rid her body of toxins. I suggested Sitari, a very cooling pranayama, because she indicated that ice packs often help her when she is in the early stages and even when she is full blown symptomatic. Studies have also found there to be a link between those who get frequent headaches also have gastrointestinal issues. A side benefit of Sitali is that it can aid in digestion.

After two weeks, she reported that although she was ok with the Kapalabhati breathwork, she didn't feel any real benefits and it felt the least natural for her to practice. In addition, she did note that it became agitating when her symptoms were escalating. She much preferred the Sitali and said that practicing this was definitely calming to her. She noted that she was able to shift her focus from her pain to her breath.

In addition to a regular yoga practice, she also practiced fully supported Janu Sirsasana, supported shoulderstand (with a chair), and supported child's pose. She practiced each pose during the various stages of her migraine and found the most comforting for her most severe symptoms were the child's pose and the fully supported Janu Sirsasana, adding that she felt a complete sense of relaxation with them both. She said that supported shouldstand was more agitating and she felt far too much pressure in the head when she practiced this in the escalating and during a migraine. She did say that during every other stage, it was one of her favorites!

Our next session, we practiced the Mild Symptom sequence. We began sitting in Virasana and experimented with Ujjayi breathing. I explained the benefits of using this breathwork not only when she is symptomatic, but also when she practices sun salutations or other vinyasas to regulate her breath. Just before savasana, I introduce her to Belly Breathing. I suggest she try this when her symptoms feel like they are spiraling toward a full migraine. This, coupled with gentle music, can bring her attention out of her head and to her breath, allowing the prana to flow throughout her diaphragm and belly. We complete the practice with Vipariti Karani and savasana, with an eye pillow to block all light, and gentle calming music to further soothe the senses. I ask her to work on her pranayamas and let me know if she experiences any unusual physical effects. I ask her to practice to continue practicing the restorative postures and add Vipariti Karani.

Two weeks later we meet and my student explains that she really enjoys the ujjayi breath as well as the belly breathing. Both pranayamas are calming and help to redirect her attention toward something more positive. She describes feeling better and experiences fewer full blown attacks. She loves Vipariti Karani and finds this pose to be very restful and easy to do as it requires very few props. We talk about finding more balance in her days and the importance of establishing a set sleep schedule. We talk about meditation and she explains that she has been trying meditation on her own. I go over some of the many benefits of meditation, as well as some simple meditations that she can do on her own. I suggest to her that meditating may also help her to find more restful sleep.

Our next session I introduce my student to the king of restorative poses – Supta Baddha Konasana. I leave her in this pose for a full 10 min. While in this pose, we go through Anapana with gentle music playing in the background. Next, we play with some simple vinyasas and practice linking the breath, explaining the benefits of keeping the breath flowing throughout the body and bringing that same awareness off the mat and into your daily life. After a mild practice we finish with a fully supported Bridge pose, legs extended, feet resting on blocks set against a wall, torso supported by a bolster to allow the heart to open. She stays here for 5 minutes. Then we set up for Yoga Nidra. We listen to the guided Restorative Yoga Nidra meditation by Dr. Siddharth Ashvin Shah, *Splendor of Meditation*.

**Using Meditation
to Change our Relationship with, and Perception of Pain.**

heyam duhkam-anagatam

That which is to be overcome is sorrow yet to come.

Yoga Sutra 2:16

Jon Kabat-Zinn is a leading authority on using meditation to treat chronic pain. As a long time Buddhist practitioner and hatha yoga student, Kabat-Zinn pioneered the use of Mindful Meditation at his Stress Reduction Clinic at the UMass Medical Center. He explains that when people experience the physicality of pain they also experience the *thoughts* which accompany the pain. The questions of “why” and “how” and the expectation that it will happen again all may contribute to and amplify the stresses of the actual pain. Whether or not one can actually reduce the tangible physical sensations of pain, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that individuals can, via meditation, certainly change *perceptions* and possibly even lessen the actual severities of how pain is experienced.

Meditation is not about *fixing* the pain but, rather, about openly acknowledging, feeling, honoring, and moving with and through the pain. Meditation is about cultivating new relationships with the pain one feels and about integrating an understanding of the impermanence of feeling bad and the impermanence of feeling well.

The very purpose of meditation is self-realization. Tias Little describes meditation as a “clear-headed ability to witness things as they are.” He references the Diamond Sutra and its call to “*develop a mind that clings to nothing.*” In this way, meditation helps us to bear witness to the pain, allows us to clearly feel it, and then empowers us to let it go. This, of course, takes effort by way of consistent practice and a belief that by doing so one consciously and actively chooses not to suffer.

**The following meditations can be used
throughout each stage of migraine.**

Set up: Sit in a comfortable upright position. Draw the skull back to align the ears over the shoulders. Sit with a long spine, lift the back of your head and slightly descend the chin. Rest the hands, palms up or down, comfortably on your thighs between the knees and hips.

Meditating on the Breath: Close your eyes and simply be present in the moment. Notice whatever sounds or thoughts or feelings you might be having without judgement. Now, bring your attention to your breath. simply notice the breath as it moves in and out as your body inhales and exhales. Notice how effortless the breath moves, notice the air as it passes through your nostrils, notice the pattern it makes in your chest and abdomen. Don't try to alter your breath pattern in any way, just simply be aware. As the mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to the awareness of your breath.

Visualization Meditation: Close your eyes. Visualize a "hole" as the release valve for your migraine. Breathe in and out through the top of your head and allow the tension or pressure or whatever sensation you are feeling flow out of your body and through the imaginary hole.

Chakra Meditation: Meditating on the 6th Chakra, the Ajna Chakra, the center of the skull behind the eyebrows. Close your eyes, clear your mind of any distractions, and bring your focus to your breath. Imagine the "3rd eye", your inner wisdom, in the center of your forehead. Imagine a white light emanating from this 3rd eye.

Stream of Thoughts Meditation: Close your eyes and simply be present in the moment. Turn your attention inward and focus on your breath. Now, as your thoughts or emotions arise, simply notice them and then let them go. The image can be of gently blowing a cloud away. In this meditation, as the thoughts or emotions come up, take note and then let them go.

Walking Meditation: Spend a little time standing still, allowing your awareness to be with your body. Notice the temperature outside. Take note of sensations in your body as you are standing. Notice your breath. Now begin walking at a relaxed, mindful pace. As you find your attention drawn to the outside world, bring your attention back to your body. Fully experience the physical experience of walking. As your mind wanders, bring your attention back to the experience of walking. Notice the sensation of your feet as they make contact with the earth. Feel the entire foot, then your calf, then thigh, etc until you mentally scan your whole body as you are walking. Let go of any tension that you may experience. Notice the rhythm and cadence of your walk. As outside elements come in, bring your attention back to your experience of walking.

Yoga Nidra: Also referred to as “Yogic sleep”, this meditation is based on visualization that guides the practitioner into a conscious deep sleep. Unlike a normal sleep, the student experiences an inward lucidity while experiencing a deep relaxation. This meditation is best done with an experienced yoga teacher who guides you or through a Yoga Nidra Meditation CD where one enters a state of deepest possible relaxation.

In Conclusion....(Yet, Only the Beginning)

My student and I agree to meet regularly to practice and discuss how the program is working for her. We realize that this is an ongoing process and we are mindful to be open and present to whatever arises and to change or amend, if necessary, the sequences or pranayama accordingly. She is already feeling the positive effects of a regular, focused practice. While not clear of migraines altogether, the frequency and severity have become more manageable. I believe strongly in a varied Yogic approach, one in which gives her a more active practice when appropriate, setting her up for restful sleep and more restorative postures when called for, giving her the tools to calm her nervous system. These sequences, coupled with Pranayama and Meditation give her the ability to take charge of her experience and create new healthy patterns, creating positive Samskaras, which lead to a healthier, more joyful life. Another positive outcome is that she is now very interested in Yoga philosophy and history, which I believe will only help on her path to end her suffering from chronic migraine pain.

Sa tu dirgha kala nairantarya satkara sevito drudha bhumih

Yoga Sutra 1.14

In Sutra 1.14, Patanjali wisely advises a consistent and steady practice. In doing so, you train your body and breath to still the fluctuations of the mind and cultivate an inner awareness, of your breath, body, and mind. Breaking habitual patterns and unhealthy cycles takes time. Change does not happen overnight. An unwillingness to live in the shadow of chronic pain is all that is necessary to begin. This process will take diligent effort and a routine reaffirmation that one day you can live without chronic pain, that your body will no longer be ruled by stress, and there can be an end to your suffering.

“A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.”

Lao-Tzu

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