

american

# FITNESS

July/August 2015 \$4.50



Being Book Smart  
Is Not Enough

**EARN CEUS:**  
BUILDING MENTAL  
MUSCLE TOWARD  
NEUROPLASTICITY

HAVE YOU TRIED  
THESE RESISTANCE  
BAND MOVES?

sarina  
jain

The Evolution of Masala Bhangra

With the increasing popularity of yoga we see it being used in many different ways. Yoga can be a terrific adjunct to balance intense weight training programs, as well as a useful aid for stress and sleep problems. While more advanced yoga poses are popular on social media, there's also a huge movement around its more medicinal uses.

Yoga has been practiced for thousands of years and its therapeutic applications have a wide range. Let's look at the three common areas in which yoga has shown significant benefit: sleep, headaches and low-back pain.

### *Sleep*

Sleep is important for performance and recovery,<sup>1</sup> but it is really an essential element of total optimal health. As the acupuncturist and yoga teacher at Nike World Headquarters for over 6 years, I know firsthand how important sleep is in the world of professional sports. If sleep quality or duration is low it can significantly affect muscles, organs and mental health.

One of yoga's biggest health potentials is its ability to help regulate the nervous system and, more specifically, to increase parasympathetic tone. The parasympathetic nervous system helps our bodies to rest and digest as well as detoxify and repair muscle tissue. During sleep, the parasympathetic

mode is activated, but if the body is stuck in sympathetic mode from stress or wandering thoughts, sleeping can be difficult. Research shows that yoga benefits all aspects of sleep quality, including both falling asleep and staying asleep.<sup>2</sup>

The easy legs-up-the-wall pose helps with sleep: Lie on your back with hips on the floor and legs resting on the wall. Find a distance from the wall where your legs can relax. Once comfortable, close your eyes and start to deepen your breath, counting your inhale and matching your exhale to the same length (e.g., inhale for a count of 4, exhale for 4). Repeat that for several minutes, then let the breath be natural as you lie there for a total of 5 to 10 minutes. It's best to do this pose right before bed with the lights off so you can roll onto your side and crawl into bed to help the nervous system transition smoothly to sleep.

### *Headaches*

In a recent study yoga significantly reduced both headache frequency and intensity.<sup>3</sup> A simple routine can train the muscles and the mind to relax by triggering the parasympathetic response. One position that may be incredibly helpful for headaches involves using a yoga block to help release trigger points and tension in

## SIMPLE STEPS TO FEELING BETTER

BY TIFFANY CRUIKSHANK

# Yoga REMEDIES

the neck that are usually the culprits of tension-type headaches; this position is often useful for migraines as well. To begin, lie on your back and place a yoga block behind your head at its middle height. The lower ridge of the block closest to your shoulders should be just at the base of the skull so that it rests on the block. Without lifting off the block, slowly turn your head to the right as far as you comfortably can, then turn halfway back to center and you should feel a ridge of muscle tension there. Stay there and try to relax as much as possible—while you relax, the block will be able to sink into the deeper layers of tension underneath. The key to this pose is to relax and allow gravity to do the work for you by letting your head rest on the block. Stay for a minute or two, then repeat on the left side.

### Low-Back Pain

Most people will experience back pain at some point in their lives, and it's one of the most common reasons for doctor's visits or missing work.<sup>4</sup> Yoga can be beneficial for nonspecific low-back pain and sciatica, but it's also helpful for low-back pain accompanied by disc problems.<sup>5</sup> The Supta Padangusthasana or Supine Low Back Release is a simple pose with three variations that can be used to release tension and pain in the lower back by targeting the hamstrings and hip muscles. To begin, lie on your back and place a strap around the ball of your right foot; then slowly straighten your right leg until you begin to feel a gentle stretch in your hamstrings. You still want to be able to relax the lower back muscles, so bend your knee or ease off the strap until you can relax a bit. Stay there for 1 to 2 minutes. Then take the strap in your right hand and open the leg out to your right. Relax again and stay for 1 to 2 minutes. For the last variation, remove the strap and bend both legs over to one side to rest on the floor. Stay for 1 to 2 minutes then repeat all three movements on the left side.

### Practice Benefits for All

As you can see, there are many ways to approach a yoga practice. Some can

be very relaxing and restorative, others more focused on releasing the muscles, and still others are strength and stability based. As a trainer it's important to meet the diverse needs of your clients. Yoga is a great way to round out the tools that you give them. It helps the muscles maintain elasticity, the nervous system adapt to stress or high-intensity training, and the mind and internal organs to get the maximum benefits from the exercises. For more information on combining anatomy and physiology with yoga to provide clients with personalized prescriptions, go to [www.YogaMedicine.com](http://www.YogaMedicine.com). AF

.....  
**TIFFANY CRUIKSHANK LAC, MAOM, RYT**, is the founder of *Yoga Medicine*, an anatomically based training system that trains teachers all over the world to work more powerfully with their students. Cruikshank was previously the Acupuncturist & Yoga Teacher at the Nike World Headquarters and contributes to the anatomy column for *Yoga Journal* among other publications.

### REFERENCES:

1. MAH, C.D., ET AL. "THE EFFECTS OF SLEEP EXTENSION ON THE ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE OF COLLEGIATE BASKETBALL PLAYERS." *SLEEP*, 34, NO. 7 (JUL 2011): 943-50. DOI: 10.5665/SLEEP1132. WWW.NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/PMC/ARTICLES/PMC3119836 (ACCESSED APR 14, 2015).
2. KHALSA, S.B.S. "TREATMENT OF CHRONIC INSOMNIA WITH YOGA: A PRELIMINARY STUDY WITH SLEEP-WAKE DIARIES." *APPLIED PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGY AND BIOFEEDBACK*, 29, NO. 4 (DEC 2004): 260-78. WWW.NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/PUBMED/15707256 (ACCESSED APR 14, 2015).
3. KISAN, R., ET AL. "EFFECT OF YOGA ON MIGRAINE: A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY USING CLINICAL PROFILE AND CARDIAC AUTONOMIC FUNCTIONS." *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF YOGA*, 7, NO. 2 (JUL 2014): 126-32. WWW.NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/PUBMED/25035622 (ACCESSED APR 14, 2015).
3. "BACK PAIN." WWW.MAYOCLINIC.ORG/DISEASES-CONDITIONS/BACK-PAIN/BASICS/DEFINITION/CON-20020797 (ACCESSED APR 14, 2015).
4. MONRO, R., ET AL. "DISC EXTRUSIONS AND BULGES IN NONSPECIFIC LOW BACK PAIN AND SCIATICA: EXPLORATORY RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL COMPARING YOGA THERAPY AND NORMAL MEDICAL TREATMENT." *JOURNAL OF BACK AND MUSCULOSKELETAL REHABILITATION*, EPBU AHEAD OF PRINT (SEP 2014). WWW.NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/PUBMED/25271201 (ACCESSED APR 14, 2015).



LOW-BACK PAIN



HEADACHES



LOW-BACK PAIN