

SELF-CARE FOR SPECIFIC NEEDS HANDOUTS

Self-Care to Reduce Headache Frequency

Self-Care for a Headache in Progress

Self-Care for Insomnia

Self-Care during Menopause

Self-Care for Smokers

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Self-Care for Those Who Work on Their Feet

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SELF-CARE TO REDUCE HEADACHE FREQUENCY

Chronic headaches usually result from multiple factors. You can decrease your headaches by reducing factors like tension in your neck and shoulders, excess life stress, hormonal imbalances, unexpressed emotions, or toxic reactions to medications or alcohol. Try keeping a headache “log” to help you determine any patterns that may be contributing to your headaches.

Note: If you ever experience a sudden severe headache unlike anything you’ve experienced before, seek medical attention immediately.

Here are some other suggestions:

1. Muscle tension is often the culprit in chronic headaches. Massage is one of the most effective methods of relaxing muscles.
2. Frequent, gentle stretching of the neck and shoulders can also help relieve muscle tension.
3. Exercise, whether aerobic, yoga, tai chi, or some other activity may help reduce your stress and tension.
4. Drinking plenty of water and eating a balanced diet can help keep your system in balance.
5. If you work at a desk, make sure your computer is set up correctly to prevent eyestrain and strain on your neck muscles. Seek help from your ergonomics department at work or ask your massage therapist for more information.
6. Stress counseling may help you learn to relax and let go of things you can’t control.

Your massage therapist may be able to refer you to qualified and experienced exercise and yoga instructors, nutritionists, naturopaths and stress counselors.

RESOURCES

Headache Help: A Complete Guide to Understanding Headaches and the Medicines That Relieve Them. Lawrence Robbins, MD and Susan Long.

An Alternative Medicine Definitive Guide to Headaches. Robert Milne, MD and Blake Moore with Burton Goldberg.

SELF-CARE FOR A HEADACHE IN PROGRESS

For a headache in progress, try the following. You may find the earlier you stop whatever you're doing and try one of these techniques, the more likely you will find relief.

Note: If you ever experience a sudden severe headache unlike anything you've experienced before, seek medical attention immediately.

1. Cold or hot packs. Put ice (or a bag of frozen peas) in a cloth and press it against the painful spot, or against the back of your neck. If you don't get relief, switch to a heating pad, hot water bottle, a microwavable hot pack, or a hot, wet towel, covered with plastic wrap and a dry towel or fleece to hold in the heat. Try each for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.
2. Brush your hair. Brush from the temple, moving gradually to the base of the skull. Do one side a time. Then work down the center of your head.
3. Massage your head.
 - Use your fingers to make small circles on your forehead, temples, and scalp. Massage for up to 30 seconds in each spot. Use a comfortable amount of pressure.
 - Try this acupressure technique. With your thumb and first finger, squeeze a point near the base of your thumb on your other hand in the webbing between your thumb and first finger. Hold until the discomfort subsides. Repeat up to five times.
4. Also try neck massage. Reach around and cup the base of your neck with your palm. Using a comfortable amount of pressure, knead the muscle slowly from bottom to top.
5. Consider increasing the frequency of your massage sessions, even if you must reduce the length of each session. The benefits of massage are cumulative and may act to prevent the development of tension that can lead to headaches.

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SELF-CARE FOR INSOMNIA

Insomnia is a problem for many people, and the worry about not sleeping can become a problem of its own. Occasional insomnia is common and may be a response to excitement or temporary worry. It will do you no harm as long as you remain reasonably energetic in your daily life. Also, you may not realize that you need less sleep as you get older, and may think you have insomnia when you can't get the hours you were used to getting. If you do feel over tired or too tense to relax, try the following tips. If you don't get results, consult your physician—it's possible you may be experiencing anxiety or depression.

1. Don't work in bed. If the bedroom is used for paying bills or studying, entering it can become a signal to become active rather than to go to sleep.
2. Instead of watching TV before bedtime, listen to relaxing music and practice deep breathing for 10 or 20 minutes.
3. Get some exercise every day so your body feels tired at night.
4. Try a warm bath before bed. Adding Epsom salts will increase your relaxation.
5. Make sure your bed is comfortable and that you are not too hot or too cold.
6. Avoid alcohol and caffeine in the evening.
7. A snack before bed helps many people, but a big meal may keep you up as your digestive system works overtime.
8. Use relaxation techniques such as slow abdominal breathing. Breathe slowly, concentrating on filling your abdomen like a balloon. Continue for up to 5 minutes at a time, but stop if you get dizzy.
9. Try some gentle floor stretches before bed. Lying down with your feet on the floor and your knees up, lower your knees from side to side. Tilt your pelvis forward and back several times. Slowly turn your head from side to side. Stretch gently and slowly anywhere you feel tight.
10. Regular massage can help relieve cumulative tension in your body. People often report that they sleep better after a massage.

SELF-CARE DURING MENOPAUSE

Menopause, a process spanning a number of years, is different for every woman. You may have few or very mild discomforts. It's also possible you have been experiencing symptoms like irregular periods, night sweats, headaches, or insomnia. You may also experience achy joints, irritability, and fatigue. Heavy bleeding during periods, bloating, and difficulty concentrating are also commonly reported.

While menopause is natural and normal, some symptoms, especially in combination, can be frustrating and stressful. Here are some tips for coping with them.

1. Acupuncture and naturopathy can help greatly with hormone imbalances and their effects. Ask for referrals.
2. Meditation is a gentle way to slow down, tune into your body and emotions, and increase your ability to focus. Practice focusing on your natural breath as it flows in and out, or on a word with no special meaning for you, for example the word "one." If you are interested, ask your massage therapist, family, and friends for referrals to meditation classes in the community.
3. Regular exercise offers some of the same benefits as massage. It improves circulation which can help you feel better both mentally and physically. It also stimulates the release of endorphins, the body's natural pain-reliever and mood booster.
4. Take regular time away to be alone or with someone you enjoy. Make special dates for being in nature, engaging in a creative activity like art, making music, writing, or practicing some other activity that renews your spirit.
5. Hydrotherapy such as hot baths, saunas, hot tubs, or footbaths can offer soothing relaxation. Add essential oils such as lavender, ylang-ylang, rose, or rosemary to a tub or footbath for an enhanced sense of well-being.
6. Regular massage can offer you time out to relax and let go of anxiety and irritability. It improves mobility in the muscles and joints, can ease headaches and muscle tension, and can increase your energy and ability to concentrate.

SELF-CARE FOR SMOKERS

If you are trying to reduce or quit smoking it may seem at times like an impossible battle. Try these tips to help meet your goal.

1. Take time to relax and reward yourself with healthy, pleasurable activities like hot baths, walking in parks or by the water, or massage.
2. Self-massage to your hands may reduce craving and withdrawal symptoms.
 - Rub the palm and sides of the hand in circular motions.
 - Massage the fingers and bend them back gently.
 - Squeeze the webbing between the thumb and index finger for 30 seconds.
3. Both acupuncture and hypnosis has helped many people quit smoking. Ask for referrals to these professionals.
4. Make sure you drink plenty of water. Drinking water aids the functioning of the whole body including the circulation and the kidneys, which are both involved with relieving the body of waste products and will play a large part in ridding your body of nicotine. Saunas, steams, and hot tubs are also good tools to help you “sweat it out.”
5. Regular exercise can also help you feel better by improving your circulation and releasing endorphins, the body’s natural “feel-good” hormones.
6. Many hospitals offer quit smoking classes and support groups that may help you quit or support you to resist the urge to start again.
7. Try this relaxation exercise. Close your eyes and tense all your muscles and then relax them as fully as possible. Inhale deeply, filling your lungs with air, then hold it. Slowly release the air from your lungs as you exhale and keep breathing out until you feel as if you can’t breathe out any more. While you do this let your arms fall by your side and let your chin fall onto your chest. Imagine that as you breathe out all the tension and stress is leaving your body from your fingers and your toes. Repeat this process three times. Repeat as often as you need while you are withdrawing from nicotine.
8. Don’t expect too much too fast. Turning around a nicotine addiction may take time, and good habits that will last your lifetime are often best developed gradually.

SELF-CARE FOR SURGERY

Rest and relaxation are vital for healing from surgery. Follow your physician's instructions to the letter. Here are some additional ways to help you relax both before and after surgery:

1. Be informed about your surgery. Many of your anxieties can be laid to rest by asking all your questions.
2. Talk over your fears with a trusted friend or even a professional counselor. Keeping them bottled inside can make you feel tense and overwhelmed.
3. Visualize the surgery going smoothly and resolving quickly and successfully. Take time to focus on your breath while you do this visualization. Use this visualization as you are "going under."
4. During your hours in rest and recovery, meditate on your breath, allowing your lungs to exhale completely and easily and keeping your inhales very relaxed and unforced. You may also want to try progressive relaxation of your muscles. Simply go through each area of your body from head to toes, tensing and holding, and then relaxing each part in turn. Of course, you want to be aware of the part of your body that's recovering from your surgery and avoid tensing or moving that part until advised by your physician. You may also want to bring a headset with you and listen to relaxing or sacred music while you are in recovery.

When you are ready and only after you check with your physician, massage can help you recover from your surgery. Though you may not want to receive massage to the area where the surgery was performed, a general massage can improve the circulation of both blood and lymph, bringing much needed oxygen and nutrients to your tissues, and carrying away irritating waste products. This can reduce swelling and speed healing.

Another option is a type of bodywork known as lymph drainage massage. This gentle technique can stimulate your immune system, alleviate pain, help you detoxify from medications, and prevent swelling. For best results, several sessions are needed.

SELF-CARE FOR THOSE WHO WORK ON THEIR FEET

If you work on your feet, you should wear comfortable, supportive shoes with flexible soles. Good quality athletic shoes are the best. If you can't wear them at work, see your physical therapist, doctor or podiatrist for other ideas for getting good foot and back support from your shoes.

For your exercise program, consider swimming or water exercise instead of running or walking. This will help you avoid further stressing your feet and legs.

To relax the muscles of your feet and ankles, soak them in warm water. Add Epsom salts and, if you like, a few drops of the essential oils of peppermint, eucalyptus, and/or rosemary to the bath water. Soak for at least ten minutes.

Roll a golf or other small ball under the soles of your feet. Some people like to freeze the ball beforehand and use it after a hot bath for an additional boost to the circulation in your feet. If this sounds appealing to you, freeze water in a Dixie cup and massage your feet for a minute or two with the ice. Or fill a plastic pop or water bottle and freeze. Roll it under your foot like any other foot roller.

Get regular massage to your feet and lower legs. Massage can relieve tension and increase circulation to the muscles, ligaments and tendons that do the hard work of supporting your body.

SELF-CARE DURING BEREAVEMENT

If you have suffered a loss, grief is an appropriate response. It is normal and natural to feel numb, empty, anxious, depressed, or intensely sad. What can you do to get through this difficult time?

1. Talk about it. Share these feelings with friends, family members, or a minister, rabbi, or spiritual counselor—anyone that you feel supports you and can listen with compassion. If you find it hard to talk with those in your everyday life, consider seeing a professional counselor. Your massage therapist may be able to refer you to experienced, trusted professionals in the community.
2. Get regular massage or a massage that's a little longer than usual. Massage increases circulation. Stress hormones are flushed away and the flow of endorphins, natural mood elevators, is increased. In a massage session, you can let go and enjoy a much-needed sense of peace and nurturing. Massage sometimes prompts tears and the expression of sadness. This is a natural, normal emotional response to nurturing touch.
3. People who are grieving not only feel overwhelmed with sadness, but often feel very sensitive to their environment. You may want to find a place that feels particularly safe to express your feelings. This could be at home, with a formal or informal support group, or a favorite place in nature.