

Migraine and Me:

One Woman's Way of
Preventing Headaches

by Ada Robinson

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At six a.m. I wake with a dull, throbbing pain at the base of my skull. In the past, this would have been the stomach-turning sign of a migraine that had started and could not be avoided.

But now, things are different. I'd read about relieving headaches with pressure on specific points on the head and neck. That was reinforced by a talk I heard about relieving pain with pressure on muscles and the points where muscles attach to bone. I'd learned to play with the idea of energy flowing through my body and had practiced picturing energy flows.

So, awake with the beginnings of a migraine, I spend half an hour on massage and visualization. I go back to sleep for a while and get up at eight a.m. without a headache.

Knowing migraines aren't inevitable is a wonderful gift. I am careful of how much I drink – alcohol seems to be the current trigger of my migraines, and I avoid alcohol altogether if I have an important event the next day – but now I am not afraid of the looming threat.

This is a gift I want to share. If these techniques work for me, perhaps they will work for others. I want to spread the joy.

While I am neither a medical professional nor an expert in massage or energy flow, I *am* an expert – the *only* expert – in how my body feels.

You are the expert in how *your* body feels. Pay attention to your body, try these techniques, and perhaps you too will be able to manage your migraines.

The three parts of my prevention process

1. Rubbing, stretching and applying pressure to my muscles.
2. Picturing tension leaving my body.
3. Picturing healthy energy coming into my body.

1. Rubbing, stretching and applying pressure to the muscles

This part is further subdivided into:

1.1 Rubbing the scalp, neck, and shoulders.

1.2 Stretching the neck and eye muscles.

1.3 Applying concentrated pressure to temples, jaw, base of skull, and shoulders.

For me, it is important to do these when the pain first starts. “Later” can be too late. I do these in the order I describe them, and then repeat until the pain is largely gone or my hands need a rest. If the pain persists, I do them again after a while. And again.

I do the neck and shoulder massage if I’m tense or have done something likely to provoke a headache, even if no pain has started.

As you try these, find the areas that feel most helpful to you, and concentrate on them. These most helpful areas may change over time.

1.1 Rubbing the scalp, neck, and shoulders.

Using both hands on both sides of the head, even if the pain is only on one side,

(1) Rub the top, back and sides of the skull.

(2) Rub circles on the temple between the eye and the top of the ear.

(3) Knead the muscles down the back of the neck.

(4) Knead the muscles of the upper back that lead from the base of the neck to the shoulders.

1.2 Stretching the neck and eye muscles.

Keep the spine erect and shoulders back while you do these stretches. (For me, good posture is important in avoiding headaches of all kinds.)

(1) Tip the chin down toward the chest, not curving the back forward, just bending the neck. Let the weight of the head stretch the muscles of the back of the neck. Hold for half a minute or so.

(2) Straighten the back and neck and look straight ahead. Without moving the head, slowly look up, down, and to each side, as far as you comfortably can in each direction.

(3) With the head erect, turn the head slowly to the right as far as you can comfortably turn it, hold for a few seconds, turn the head slowly to the left as far as you can comfortably turn it, and hold for a few seconds.

(3) Roll the head:

Drop the chin down, slowly tilt and roll the head to the right until the ear is over the right shoulder, then straighten the head to vertical (facing forward). Then repeat to the left: drop the chin down, slowly tilt and roll the head to the left until the ear is over the left shoulder, then straighten the head to vertical (facing forward). (Don't tip the head back.) Do this figure-of-eight two or three times.

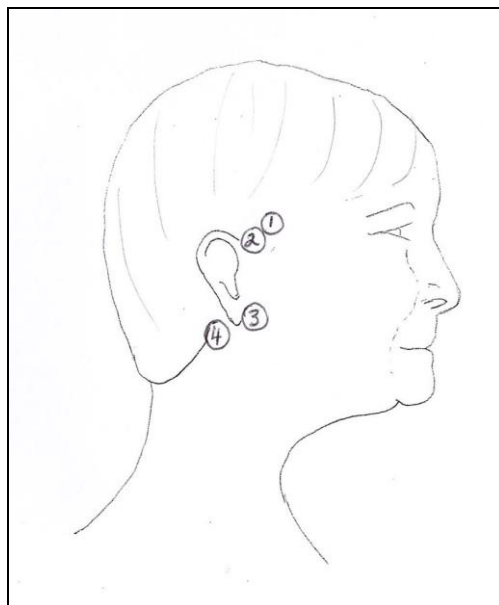
Then reverse the roll:

Tilt the head to the right so the ear is over the right shoulder, slowly roll the head forward until it is centered, then lift the head up (facing forward). Then repeat to the left: Tilt the head to the left so the ear is over the left shoulder, slowly roll the head forward until it is centered, then lift the head up (facing forward). (Don't tip the head back.) Do this figure-of-eight two or three times.

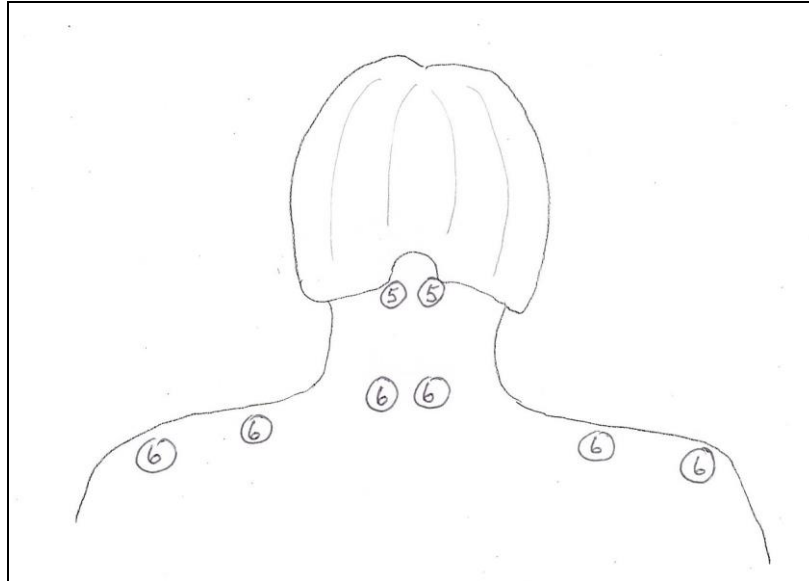
1.3 Applying concentrated pressure to temples, jaw, base of skull, and shoulders.

Using both hands on both sides of the head, press with the fingertips on the five specific points of the temples, jaw and base of skull listed and pictured below. Hold the pressure at each point for a slow count of ten or more.

- (1) On the temples an inch or so forward of the top edge of the ear.
- (2) Just in front of the point where the upper part of the ear attaches to the head.
- (3) Just in front of the point where the lower part of the ear attaches to the head. (Pressure here helps the lower jaw to relax. If you become aware of tension in the jaw, unclench it and let the lower jaw open slightly and possibly move forward slightly.)
- (4) On the corner of the skull just behind the lower part of the ear.



(5) On the base of the skull at the back, where the muscles that hold the head upright join the skull. You can try other points along the base of the skull at the back, as well.



Doing one side at a time with the opposite hand, so that the shoulder being worked on can relax,

(6) Work along the muscles of the upper back that lead from the base of the neck to the shoulder, rolling the muscles under the fingers. Apply steady pressure for a slow count of ten to any areas that feel tender.

2. Picturing tension leaving the body

While I am doing the stretching and massaging described in Part 1, I am also letting go of tension. For me, this is easier if I picture the process.

I visualize the tension as brown hooks like claws digging into and hanging from the muscles of my neck and back. To let the tension go, I picture these hooks straightening and sliding down and away.

Find an image that seems right for you. Other images you might use are a tight coil relaxing, or a shell cracking into pieces and falling away, or muddy sludge dripping off.

Picture the tension leaving not only the areas being touched and massaged, but also the rest of the body, especially deep inside.

3. Picturing healthy energy coming into the body

When the tension and pain leave, I become aware of an emptiness or dryness through my body. I lie down on my back with only a roll of thin pillow or towel under my neck. (Lying on my back with a thicker pillow seems to bring on headaches rather than relieve them.)

I picture clean energy rising through my body like water or milky sap, starting with the toes. Slowly it fills the dry spaces, reviving the body in the way water revives a drooping flower. It rises through the hips, solar plexus, heart, and neck. The energy doesn't stop in the head. I let it flow onward, out the top of the head, fountaining health on the world around me.

I lie as if in a warm stream, with life flowing gently through me and on to the rest of the world.

These visualizations are personal – different images, colours, or directions of flow may seem more 'right' to you.

This picturing is good anytime, not just when wrestling with a migraine. Relax; acknowledge all the good things in your life; let the healthy energy and gratitude flow through you and onward.

Final words

Experiment with these techniques and develop your own variations.

Persist. These techniques will help you get rid of tensions, but it may take months. Benefits are cumulative.

Best wishes to you in your search for a way of living more easily with migraine headaches.

