



Cold Caution

You're sniffing and sneezing, but you still want to practice. Here's the lowdown on what to do when you're feeling rundown.

by **Timothy McCall, MD**

As hard as you try, you can't always keep the colds and flus of winter from stuffing up your head and slowing down your body. Before you know it, you're wondering if you should attempt your regular yoga practice or give up and go to bed. Here's what I suggest.

LISTEN CLOSE Check in with your body before practice. If you're wiped out, you could make things worse by pushing through your normal routine, so try a gentle or restorative practice instead and skip strong breathing techniques. Once your energy improves, you can gradually return to a more vigorous practice even if you still have a cough or your nose is stuffy. If you feel worse after practicing, it's a sign that you've probably done too much.

TREAT YOURSELF If you feel you need to take something for your symptoms, avoid antibiotics; they are worthless for colds, and even over-the-counter cold remedies aren't very practical, since many contain five drugs when all you need is one or two. It makes more sense to take individual remedies, like slippery elm lozenges for a sore throat or acetaminophen for pain. For nasal congestion, add a few drops of eucalyptus oil to boiling water and inhale the vapors. Although it's still not clear how effective echinacea, zinc lozenges, vitamin C, and homeopathic preparations can be, you can still try them, since they are all generally very safe.

CLEAR YOUR HEAD A stuffy nose, while not serious, can really put a crimp in your practice, especially if you do a lot of Ujjayi Pranayama (Victorious Breath). To unstuff yourself, use jala neti, a yogic nasal cleansing technique: Put a quarter teaspoon of noniodized salt and eight ounces of warm water in a neti pot. Standing over a sink, tip your head to one side and insert the spout into the upper nostril, allowing the water to flow into your nose and drain from the other nostril. Repeat on the other side. You can try this several times a day if you've got a cold. Jala neti can be helpful right before pranayama or meditation practice, or even asana.

SOUND OUT YOUR SINUSES Vibrations from humming have been shown to open the sinuses and let phlegm drain, which can relieve pressure and may even



help stave off a bacterial infection of the sinuses. Try chanting Om, or, for nasal congestion, experiment with the pranayama practice of Bhramari: Press your lips together and make the sound of a buzzing bee.

STAY UPRIGHT If your head is stuffed up or you're feeling tired, modify or skip inversions like Headstand and Handstand. Even Shoulderstand can worsen nasal congestion and head pressure.

SUPPORT YOURSELF Even restful poses like Savasana (Corpse Pose) aren't easy when you're congested, so instead of lying flat, support your back on a bolster running lengthwise from your lower spine to your head, with a folded blanket under the head and neck if needed. This makes breathing easier, and it's more energizing. Supta Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose) can also be done with back support.



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