

## Yoga Exercises and Menstrual Cramps

Many girls and young women have cramps when they have their periods. Cramps usually feel like pain in the abdomen (belly), pelvis (hip area), lower back, and upper legs. The pain usually hurts worst on the day before the period begins and on the first day of the period.

If cramps are heavy (very painful), it you might not feel like you can go to school. Instead of missing school, you can try stretching and moderate-intensity exercise to help relieve the pain caused by cramps.

You may feel like you have less energy than normal during the first couple of menstrual a days, when bleeding and cramping are usually heavier. High-intensity exercises like running may not be appropriate. Instead, yoga and breathing exercises can be a good way to help reduce the pain caused by cramping. Yoga also reduces stress, improves flexibility, and strengthens muscles.

### Exercises

**Cobra, Cat, Cow and Fish** yoga poses are a few good exercises for you to try. They may help you cope with heavy cramping, and are best for your heavier menstrual days. Stretches are best done when the body is warm (as it is after a bath or shower). Each stretch should be held for 30 to 60 seconds. Please do not push to the point of pain or discomfort.

- **Cobra Pose** (Picture 1): Lie on your stomach with your legs straight and feet together, and place your hands under your shoulders. Using your hands to push you, lift your head and shoulders. Breathe deeply. Hold this pose for 30 to 60 seconds, as long as you feel comfortable. Then return to your original lying position. Breathing should be deep.

Try to completely fill the belly when you breathe in (inhale), allowing the belly to expand as you inhale. When you breathe out (exhale), the belly moves in and softens. If you are not able to take deep belly breaths you may be forcing the stretch and will need to ease out of it a bit. Breathe normally for 2 to 3 breaths, then repeat.



**Picture 1** Cobra Pose

*Continued on page 2*

## Exercises, continued

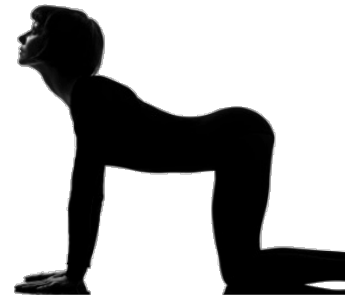
- **Cat/Cow Pose:** Get on your hands and knees. Make sure your hands are directly under your shoulders, and your knees are directly under your hips. Take a deep breath in, and lower your belly toward the ground, while you gently stretch your head and bottom to the sky. This is a cow pose (Picture 2)!

Breathe normally for 2 to 3 breaths. When you are ready to change your position, inhale deeply, then as you breathe out, curl your back toward the sky, with your head and bottom gently stretching towards the ground. This is a cat pose (Picture 3)!

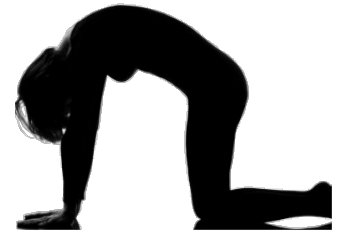
Breathe normally for 2 to 3 breaths. Slowly go back and forth between the two poses, holding them each for 2 to 3 breaths.

- **Fish pose** (Picture 4): Place a pillow on the floor. Place your back and head on the pillow and place your legs straight in front of you on the floor. Place your arms comfortably at your sides, with your palms facing up. Stay in this pose, breathing gently, as long as you feel comfortable. If having the legs straight causes low back discomfort, please bend the knees with feet flat on the floor.

During lighter menstrual days, try moderate-intensity aerobic exercises like walking or light jogging. This type of physical activity can reduce bloating (extra water weight) and the pain of cramping. Aerobic exercise helps your blood circulation and the release of “feel-good hormones” called **endorphins** (en DORF ins). These can also work together to soothe headaches and improve mood.



**Picture 2** Cow Pose



**Picture 3** Cat Pose



**Picture 4** Fish Pose