

Body Mind Yoga Information sheet

Better Sleeping

Difficulty getting to sleep or waking in the night and being unable to get back to sleep can be a frustrating experience for many people. Then waking up tired and un-refreshed is not how you would ideally like to start your day.

There are many different reasons for poor sleep patterns. Hormonal imbalance, stress, anxiety or depression can all be large contributing factors to poor sleep.

Keep in mind that when you improve the quality of your sleep you actually need less and when you gradually reduce the stresses from your mind and body you require less sleep too.

Before bed to maximize better sleep

Doing 5 minutes of gentle stretches and breathing close to bedtime can help release the stresses of the day and prepare you for sleep. Although don't do too much because it can become stimulating. You can either do the below exercises or do the salute to the moon series of exercises (see information sheet).

It's best if you can finish with either 5 minutes of sitting meditation before bed or yoga nidra deep relaxation in bed.

1. Cat and cow: Come into the all fours position, with your hands under the shoulders, knees under the hips. Breathe out and gently pull your tummy in as you tuck your chin in, tuck the tail bone under and round the back so you press your shoulder blades up to the ceiling. Then breathe in and relax the tummy, and gently lift the head and hips. Go slowly back and forth like this, arching and rounding the spine and co-coordinating the movement with the breath.

Pause in the centre and take your toes slowly from side to side a few times.

2. Yoga Mudra: From all fours, sink your hips back toward your feet and rest your forehead on the floor. You can either have your arms stretched out long in front or resting down beside you. If this is uncomfortable for your neck you can place one hand on top of the other and rest your forehead on your hands. If your knees hurt then lift the hips up into the air to take the pressure off the knees. Watch the breath in this position and you can even use ujjayi breathing if you are comfortable with this breath (see below).

3. Forward bend: stretching out the sciatic nerve is excellent for calming the nervous system and preparing for sleep – but be gentle. Sit on the floor with the legs out long in front of you, slightly apart. Have your hands on your thighs, and as you breathe out slowly lean forward from the waist and slide the hands down the legs toward the feet – you can bend the knees a little as you do this. Then breathe in and slowly come back up. Go up and down like this and if it feels good, then you can hold the position and breathe.

4. Ujjayi breathing: To learn ujjayi breathing, start by breathing out through the mouth like you were trying to fog a mirror – so you make a rasping sound with the breath at the throat. Then breathe in and see if you can make the same sound – do this a few more times breathing through the mouth. Then close your mouth and breathe in and out through the nose and see if you can make this same rasping sound at the throat. When you are comfortable with that, make the sound softer and softer until it's so subtle that only you can hear it.

5. Alternate nostril breathing: see information sheet.

6. Meditation: see meditation home practice information sheet

7. Yoga Nidra: see the information sheet on this – you can either do this yourself when lying in bed before sleep or you can use a recording of it to listen to – ideally get an MP3 player that is small and easy to use in bed and that turns itself off once the relaxation is finished. You can download a free 10 minute yoga nidra from www.chiasma.com.au .

8. Salute to the moon asana series: see information sheet.

In bed if you can't sleep

1. If you find your mind just feels too busy, whilst you are lying in bed, take the chance to do some breathing practice, listen to yoga nidra or another meditation/relaxation series or listen to some relaxing music.
2. Sleep on your right side – this stimulates pressure points which open the left nostril and activate right brain function.
3. If you find you are thinking verbally (most people are) – such as having a conversation with yourself or someone – “this happened, they did this, this is what I should do” etc, then see if you can think in images – think of any images you can – trees, mountains, birds, people, remember holidays in images – this can change your brain activity to the right brain.
4. Avoid stressing about the fact that you can't sleep and worrying about how tired you are going to feel in the morning –this doesn't help. Take the time to just enjoy resting, watching your breath. Simply lying down, in the dark where its quiet is very restful for your body and mind – know that you are getting the rest you need just doing this and relax.

Other sleep tips

1. More exercise during the day.
2. Avoid caffeine after 10am (or for some people who are very sensitive any time of the day).
3. Avoid stimulating activities such as watching television late at night.
4. Get to bed before 10pm if possible.
5. Don't have your mobile phone on near your bed at night and avoid sleeping near active power points.
6. See a naturopath to balance out your hormonal system and for some possible herbal alternatives to help you sleep. We have found the naturopaths at “West Coast Natural Therapies Clinic” to be very effective (ph: 92464067).