



YOGA THERAPY

BY KAITLYN VITTOZZI

Exercises for Better Sleep

I am not a sleep specialist, but a Yoga Therapist. Much of what I am going to share in this article comes from the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda and Yoga.

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That being said, I have also tried to account for the very busy corporate lifestyles that many of you are living in the northeast, which likely looks different than ancient India, but we can absolutely use it today, combined with neuroscience, to make a shift toward healthier habits.

Get Scheduled: This probably isn't what you want to hear but a good night's sleep really begins that morning. Try to get yourself in the habit of waking up and going to bed at the same time every day. Even on weekends! Ideally you are waking up at 6 AM or before and going to bed at or before 10 PM. I know, after putting in 40+ hours of work and a morning rolls around where you don't have to get up early, it is so tempting to lounge in bed, but get the covers off and greet the sun. Imagine how much more smoothly mornings would go if you had an hour to yourself before the day started. Conversely, if we have worked all day it might feel like we want to treat ourselves with a few glasses of wine before bed to help ourselves fall asleep, but this can negatively impact our sleep so that it feels less restful. Also make sure you are getting some physical activity in during the day.

Setup Your Space: Setup your bedroom exclusively for sleep and sex. It doesn't need a tv, exercise bike, board games or your work laptop. Consider diffusing some essential oils, and if you do have a hard time getting a good night's sleep have a thick blanket nearby that you can rest

on your pelvis for some additional comforting weight. Ware consuming so much through our senses every day – news, flavors, sounds, other people's emotions. Aim to let your senses rest in your bedroom. You also don't need any additional negativity before bed so if you find yourself scrolling news headlines or social media when you could be catching some z's in the evening, buy yourself an alarm clock and leave that phone plugged in in another room.

Stop the Thoughts: While I know many of the people reading this could easily just black out from exhaustion when their heads hit the pillow, where I feel yoga is most impactful on sleep hygiene is really letting you brain move away from busy into present moment. What keeps many people in the United States from sleeping is an influx of thoughts: not just worried mind but also thoughts of what else has to get done the next day or what didn't get done today. As I tell clients, trying to go from fully awake to sleep doesn't always work. You need a gray area to prepare yourself for sleep.

I like to use the concept of the brain waves to explain this. We have busy Beta brainwaves, that we use to problem solve. We don't need those to sleep but we live there most of the day. Alpha waves are more relaxed. Theta waves are extremely relaxed or light sleep. Delta are the slowest brainwaves which is where deep sleep happens, and ultimately where we want to be at night. Going from Beta

to Delta doesn't work. Some of the limbs of yoga - postures, breathwork and meditation - let you achieve those relaxed brainwaves in between to literally let yourself unwind.

Traditional ancient wisdom might say that the only yoga posture you should do before bed is savasana, or corpse pose where you lie flat on your back. Maybe you will get there eventually. I am going to make a few more recommendations to help you slowly back away from those Beta brainwaves. Restorative yoga is great for this. Warm up with a few cats and cows (arching and rounding the spine). Make your way onto your back and hug one knee into your chest with your hands on top of your shin for pavanmuktasana (wind relieving pose). While you do these postures practice elongating your exhale. Not needing to exaggerate it so much so that you are forcing it, just slightly longer than your inhale. Hold for 10 or more breaths and then switch sides. After your legs are stretched, try Viparita Karani (legs up the wall), which can also be done on your living room floor with your legs on the couch. Allow your spine to relax and you can move yourself far enough away from the wall that the sensation in the backs of your legs is very mild.

Focus on Now: A fourth limb of yoga is concentration. Now if you want to get into that savasana pose you should be able to tune into breathing, your body and here and now vs. what is happening tomorrow. Try to dose off

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on your own however another useful tool to have is a Yoga Nidra or yogic sleep recording. There are tons of free resources for these online and it helps you hang out in those Alpha waves until you find Delta. Yoga Nidra is also helpful if you wake up in the middle of the night.

If you are looking for additional

resources I highly recommend Acharya Shunya’s Ayurveda Lifestyle Wisdom, yogatherapy.health and Sleepfoundation.org. Remember, healthy sleep routines are a habit, just the way going to the gym is so if this doesn’t work out perfectly on the first try, keep trying. Also, every BODY is different so if you have questions go to PenfieldYogaTherapy.com

or email kaitlyn@tozziyoga.com. I would love to hear what is working and not working for you so we can troubleshoot together.

