

# A good night's sleep: overcoming insomnia

Breathing, relaxation, and meditation exercises that may help you sleep better:

## 1) Yoga Postures

Try some yoga just before bed. These are especially helpful before sleep: full yogic breath, the hare pose, and the child pose.

## 2) Tensing and Relaxing Muscles

This is the first formal exercise on the CD after some light shoulder and neck relaxation. If you wish, you can inhale while tensing, and exhale while relaxing. Do this exercise standing up, or lying on your back in bed.

## 3) Full Body Scan

This technique comes next on the CD, and is the most valuable one we know of for helping with insomnia. Lie on your back with arms to the side. Close the eyes and turn them downward (instead of keeping the eyes up). Mentally say "feet", then mentally say "relax", and observe the body's response. Take your time, spending at least a full few seconds on each part to deeply feel any release. Slowly moving up through the body. Breathe in a ratio of 1:2. Inhale for one count, and exhale for two counts or longer. Emphasize the exhalation.

## 4) Watching the Breath

If you haven't yet fallen asleep, try "Watching the Breath" while keeping your eyes pointed downwards. This is the final technique on the CD.

Lifestyle changes to help reduce insomnia:

- 1) Reduce intake of caffeine, especially in the 6 hours before bedtime.
- 2) There are stimulants in many drugs which people are unaware of: pseudoephedrine (used in nasal decongestants), diet pills, asthma inhalers, some antidepressants, and caffeine in some over-the-counter pain relievers. Ask your doctor about alternatives, or about taking these medications earlier in the day.
- 3) Many people drink alcohol in the evening to relax. It does initially produce sleepiness, but leads to shallow, non-restorative sleep that includes suppression of normal dream sleep. Marijuana has the same effect.
- 4) A bedtime snack can be helpful. Bananas or warm milk are recommended, both of which contain tryptophan, which helps induce sleep. Avoid starchy carbohydrates, sweets, or spicy foods.

- 5) If you tend to need the bathroom during the night, cut back on liquids near bedtime.
- 6) Remove the TV from the bedroom. Experiment with eliminating television, especially news, an hour before sleep.
- 7) Avoid taking a hot bath or strenuous exercise near bedtime. The body tends to cool down in preparation for sleep. Keep your bedroom cool.
- 8) Dim the lights as bedtime nears; TV and light tell the body that it's time to be awake.
- 9) Ayurvedic physicians recommend going to bed by 10 pm and waking up by 6 am, a natural period for deeper sleep that is disrupted by later bedtimes.
- 10) If you read in bed before falling asleep, choose something that is calming. The act of reading can induce sleepiness, because the eyes are turned downward.
- 11) If you wake up in the middle of the night and are quite awake, get up and read until you feel sleepy again. When back in bed, try the breathing and relaxation exercises as an aid to falling asleep.
- 12) On your way home from work, listen to calming music or books on tape. Or drive home in silence. Listening to radio news can be agitating to the nervous system.
- 13) Exercise 3-5 times a week.
- 14) Upon awakening, try to get 35-40 minutes of natural daylight exposure, or artificial light as an alternative.
- 15) Keep a diary of your sleep patterns and the activities you did from this list to support a good night's sleep.
- 16) Keep lists of things to do, so that you have a place to capture all the pending things on your mind. The mind is an inefficient place to store hundreds of "to do" items, and it will remind you of them day and night, disturbing your peace of mind. You can also keep a pad of paper near your bed for things that occur to you, or wake you during the night. An excellent book to help with this process is *Getting Things Done*, by David Allen.

Additional resources:

*Healing Therapies for Overcoming Insomnia*

Dr. Peter Van Houten & Rich McCord

*Say Goodnight To Insomnia*

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