

How Yoga

Can Prepare You for a Great Night's Sleep

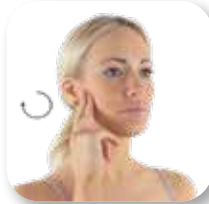
There are a number of steps you may already take to help you relax and de-stress in the evening like turning off devices, reducing light and noise levels, lighting a nice-smelling candle, or enjoying a warm non-caffeinated drink. But how about 10–15 minutes of gentle yoga exercises? That might sound counter-productive but yoga practices have been developed over thousands of years with the singular purpose of quietening your mind. Certain yoga practices, especially calming breathwork, activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which instructs your whole body to rest and relax. It can be the perfect preparation for a great night's sleep.

The following sequence has been created for you to do at any time in the evening and features a number of different yoga routines that reduce anxiety, invite calm and quieten your mind. Try them out and see which ones work for you, then you can choose to do some parts or the whole sequence depending how soon you want to fall into a deep satisfying sleep.



Easy Seated Pose (Sukhasana)

Sit on the floor however you feel most comfortable. If you find it difficult to sit on the floor, try sitting on a cushion to raise your hips or lean against a wall. Keep your upper body lifted, draw your shoulders down, rest the hands on the legs and close your eyes. Notice how you are feeling and deepen your breath for 1 to 2 minutes. Blink your eyes open.



Jaw & Cheek Massage

Using your index finger, gently massage along the line of your jaw to the chin, then up the opposite side along the jaw line. Rub your fingers over any areas which feel tight or lumpy. Use a circular motion with your fingers, travel along your jaw line 2–3 times. Do the same along your cheek bones.



Video: <http://youtu.be/mtx3-XN8rRw>

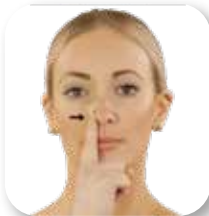


Temporalis Massage

Gently massage your temple muscles, using circular motions with your fingers. Massage all the way up and across your forehead to reduce tension headaches. You could use both hands. Enjoy for around 1 minute.



Video: <https://youtu.be/CFq88pmBaYo>

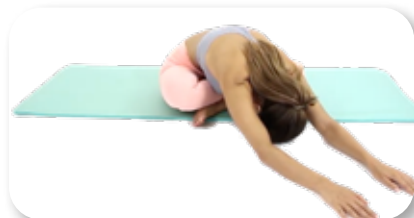


Alternate Nostril Breathing

Sitting comfortably, check your nostrils are clear and open. If so proceed, if not move onto the next practice. Close your right nostril with your thumb, inhale through your left nostril, then close your left nostril with your ring finger and exhale through your right nostril. Stay on this side, inhale right, swap to exhale left, stay to inhale left, then swap to exhale right. Continue to swap sides before each exhale. Allow your eyes to close during this practice and repeat for 2 to 3 minutes. When you finish, stay sitting with your eyes closed for a minute to notice the effects.



Video: http://youtu.be/aw_WNteoE40



Crossed-Leg Forward Stretch

Sit with your legs crossed. Place your hands out on the floor in front and glide them away from your body, keeping the palms flat on the floor. Fold your upper body on or towards your crossed legs as far as the stretch will allow, hold for 5 breaths. Come back up, cross your legs the opposite way and repeat.



Video: <https://youtu.be/QjKclB68W-g>



Neck Rotation Stretch – Lying

In a lying position, rotate your neck slowly to the left by looking over your left shoulder. Take your neck to a comfortable end of range. Repeat to the right. Make sure you keep your shoulders relaxed. Repeat 3 times each side. This is an excellent exercise to improve rotation and mobility in your neck.



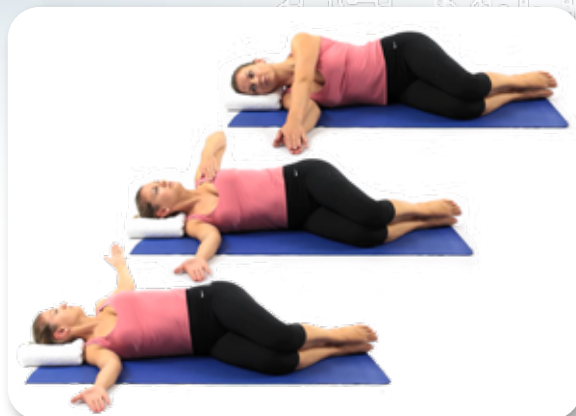
Video: <http://youtu.be/Z5Vih8KT2uc>

Lying Bow and Arrow

Lie on your right side with both knees bent, legs relaxed. Lengthen both arms out in front of you at shoulder height, with your arms together. Inhale as you bend your left elbow and slide your hand along the inside of your right arm. At the same time rotate your head, neck and upper spine to the left. Exhale as you rotate further to the left. Inhale as you straighten your left arm, lengthening your forearm away from your body. Exhale as you return your spine to neutral and lengthen your left arm out straight, back to the starting position. Do 3 rounds on each side, using deep breaths or more if it feels great.



Video: <http://youtu.be/JqxmURHQkMA>



Pretzel Lying

Lie on your back with both legs bent, feet on the floor. Bring one knee over towards the opposite side and lower towards the floor forming a gentle twist and stretch.



Video: http://youtu.be/W9C6j8Je_4c



Adductor Stretch – Wall

Lie on your back, with your legs resting against a wall, let your legs drop out to the side. You will feel a stretch on the inside of your thighs. After a minute or so in this stretch, bring your legs together and rest them against the wall with your eyes closed, attention on your natural breath for 1 to 2 minutes.



Video: http://youtu.be/K562n_OKPol



Reclining Bound Angle Pose (*Supta Baddha Konasana*)

Begin sitting on the floor. Place a cushion or folded blanket underneath your back. Lie back with bent knees and open the thighs allowing the soles of your feet to meet. Rest your arms at either side of the body, with your palms facing upwards. Close your eyes and notice the rise and fall of your chest as you breathe for 1 to 2 minutes.



Video: <https://youtu.be/2NzeczBzvhuv>



Diaphragmatic Breathing – Lying

Lie on your back, feet on the floor, hip width apart and eyes closed. Place one hand on your stomach, and your other hand on your chest. Inhale deeply enough that the hand on your belly rises up, then lowers as you exhale. Repeat for 5 breaths.

Extended Exhale Breathing: Begin to count the length of each part of your breath, once you have an equal count for your inhalation and exhale, gradually lengthen your exhalation by adding one extra count, then two, and on, up to double the length of your inhalation. After a few minutes, release your counting, let your breath find a relaxed steady pace and rest for 5 minutes. This is a great way to send yourself to sleep.



Video: <http://youtu.be/6YB0pv3iv0g>



The Author

This sequence has been put together by Alex Reed, a yoga teacher from Wimbledon, London, UK, trained by the British Wheel of Yoga. She is passionate about making yoga accessible to all bodies and sharing the physical and mental benefits of yoga with busy people everywhere. She offers mixed level yoga classes online, in-studio and on retreat via www.goodlifeyoga.co.uk

