

Ayurveda: Yoga's Sister Science

Sweet dreams

Follow some simple yoga rules for a better night's rest. *By Anja Brierley Lange*

Most people have had a period of insomnia or trouble sleeping at some point in their life. In fact, three out of every 10 people in Britain are currently suffering with insomnia, according to National Health Service research.

Sleeplessness can manifest in different ways:

- Not being able to fall asleep or taking a long time to fall asleep
- Waking up during the night and not being able to fall asleep again
- Waking up very early and staying awake
- Restless nights of waking up and falling asleep again

There are many reasons for disturbed sleep and it may be worth visiting a health care practitioner to discover the reasons why you may be restless. However, for many of us it comes down to an overactive mind.

According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, 'yoga is the settling of the mind into silence'. So, if our mind is quiet, it will be easier to have a restful sleep.

In ayurveda, it is believed an overactive mind is a *Vata* imbalance. *Vata* is associated with the element of air as well as space. Air is related to movement, expression, thinking and instability. Space is omnipresent and carries the wind of *Vata* and thoughts in our minds. So if we can calm down *Vata* we can quiet the mind.

Here's how:

Avoid stimulants

Stimulants stimulate *Vata* and also *Pitta* (fire). The first step in ayurveda is to limit any aggravating factors. Coffee, alcohol, fizzy drinks, exciting books and movies, stimulation through television and the internet, as well as hot, spicy foods should be reduced.

Calm down

Enjoy a relaxing herbal tea such as chamomile, lemon verbena or rose tea as you wind down in the evening. Hot milk with a little cinnamon is also a great relaxant.

Breathe

Notice how you actually breathe. Start to breathe deeply into the lungs so the abdomen, ribs and chest expand with every inhale. And remember to exhale slowly and completely.

Start practising Alternate Nostril Breathing (*Nadi Shodhana*, pictured opposite). Breathe in through the left nostril and out through the right. Then in through right and out through left. This is one round. You can imagine this or bring the right thumb to the right nostril and the little and ring finger to the left nostril to guide the breath. Always breathe with ease.

Practise yoga

Forward bends calm the mind and are *Vata*-pacifying. Before bedtime, enjoy a gentle forward bend such as *Paschimottasana* (seated forward bend) or *Balasana* (child's pose).

Get grounded

Massage your feet with warm sesame oil before bed. This brings the energy downwards rather than keeping it in the mind. Oil is nourishing, warming and grounding. If you are a bit fiery with *Pitta* qualities (fire) such as anger, irritation and heat, try a cooling coconut oil instead.

Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra is translated as yogic sleep. A time where we are awake and aware but our body rests and our mind is focused and calm. All you need to do is lie down and listen to a guided Yoga Nidra. You may have the aim to fall asleep but even if you do stay awake you know that you have rested completely.

Not all advice works for everyone, however. You are unique and will find your own way to a good night's sleep with patience and perhaps with the support of a yoga teacher, ayurvedic practitioner, homeopath or just some good friends. Sweet dreams. 

You can download a free Anja Brierley Lange Yoga Nidra at yogaembodied.com/yoganidra

- Peeling away the brown skin is essential.
- Maintain a regular routine for food intake.
- Eat raw fruit alone and never as a part of meal.
- Always eat cooked foods. This helps to stimulate the digestive fire therefore digesting all the food. This ensures that no food is converted into toxins.
- Concentrate on tastes that eliminate heat from the body like natural sweets (sweet fruits), bitter (all green vegetables are bitter) and astringent (many unripe fruits).
- Include plenty of fennel, coriander, peppermint, fenugreek, spinach in your food, to cleanse the skin.
- Coconut water helps to cool the body and get rid of acne.
- A cooling tea like cumin tea will help to reduce body heat.
- Aloe Vera juice with turmeric powder helps to prevent skin related conditions.



Ayurvedic massage

- Touch is fundamental to life and is as nourishing as food itself.
- Daily self-massage can turn back years and make you look younger.
- Use an ayurvedic oil to suit your skin type (*vata*, *pitta*, *kapha*). Alternatively use pure, cold pressed sesame oil for daily massage.
- Spend at least 15 minutes to massage your whole body and face. Concentrate on various marma points (energy centres). This will help release blocked energy and make you feel fresh, rejuvenated and radiant.
- Taking a warm bath or shower after a massage is essential to wash off any toxins that may be drawn out to the skin surface.
- Alternatively, use steam on your face and then apply an ayurvedic face mask containing sandalwood and rose (both skin rejuvenators).

Yoga and meditation

- Any exercise that stimulates blood circulation to the face and skin helps to bring fresh oxygenated blood to those parts.
- Downward facing dog pose helps to stretch the muscles of the whole body especially your back and legs. It also helps to

- improve blood circulation to the head and face region.
- Lion pose is great for the head, face and neck region. It improves blood circulation and strengthens the muscles of the face and neck.
- Forward bends help to keep the digestive system strong and healthy. It also helps in evacuation of the colon.
- Breathing exercises like alternate nostril breathing, cleansing breath exercise and bee breath exercise are beneficial.
- People who meditate regularly may also enjoy more beautiful younger looking skin than those who do not. Ayurveda says that inner peace and happiness is a sure way to both inner and outer beauty.
- *Tratak* (candle light meditation), which results in watering of the eyes, is good in getting rid of heat from the body, thereby reducing dark circles and wrinkles around the eyes.
- Shoulder stands are good for women as they help to regulate the thyroid gland which in turn helps to regulate the hormonal system in the body.

Daily lifestyle

- Gargle your mouth with warm sesame oil (pure, cold pressed sesame oil) each morning. Keep the oil in your mouth for at least two minutes. This helps to draw out impurities from the digestive tract and helps to keep it strong. It also helps to keep the gums and teeth strong as well as imparts a natural glow to your facial skin.
- Try and maintain a regular routine in your daily activities.
- Apply this simple recipe to your face once every two days for an amazing result: equal amounts of glycerine, rose water and lemon juice. Wash it off after 15 minutes.
- Fast once a week. On such days one can take water, fruit or vegetable juices. This helps to strengthen the digestive fire.

Ayurvedic therapies

In ayurveda, there are various massages and bodywork therapies available that form a part of the beauty treatment.

Pada Abhyanga: Ayurvedic foot massage helps to remove excess heat from the body especially when done with ghee (clarified butter).

Marma Abhyanga: This is a specialist massage whereby the 107 marma points are massaged which help to release any blocked energy in the body.

Shirodhara: This is a forehead oil flow treatment which helps to relax the mind and brain.

Udvardana: This is a very traditional massage given to brides-to-be. Finely ground ayurvedic herbs and exotic sandalwood powder are mixed with precious oils and gently massaged into the skin, which results in the stimulation of the energy flow in the body, the detoxification and nourishment of body tissues, the activation of the skin's natural metabolism and also the improvement of lymph flow.