



Yoga for Improved Sleep

This practice combines mindful awareness, conscious breathing, and movement to build a deep connection with the body. It includes poses to release tension, help to manage stress, and relax the body to prepare it for sleep.

Why Practice Yoga?

"Prison is extremely stressful, a chronic stress, and any physician can tell you about the effects of stress. Yoga attacks stress through movement, breathing, and meditation which lead to a calmer, less stressed self." D.R

"Because of yoga, I think more clearly, am physically fit, and emotionally sound. But most importantly, because I'm a very spiritual person, yoga has helped me stay more centered internally." T.H

"Before yoga my life felt unstable like an earthquake. Now I feel relaxed and grounded on a steady foundation and feel inspired for my life ahead" J.H

How Yoga and Mindful Awareness Can Improve Sleep?

Yoga and mindful awareness practices help us to wind down at the end of the day by changing our focus and practicing calming poses while consciously breathing. When we sense a threat, our bodies automatically react to protect us. Yoga helps us release stress and let our bodies know we are not in immediate danger. By releasing tension our mind and body are more ready to go into a restful state. These practices strengthen the calming part of our nervous system like other practices strengthen muscles. So the more you practice the more benefit you'll experience.

Yoga Sequence for Improved Sleep



1. Opening - Child's Pose

Come onto your hands and knees (wide apart) and sit back toward your heels. Sink your hips and relax your forehead to the floor or onto your hands. Notice the weight of your body releasing toward the floor. Try to relax your belly and muscles of your face. Feel your body breathing. Feel your belly expanding and contracting as you inhale and exhale. Try inhaling through your nose then exhaling longer with a whispering *haaa* sound (like fogging up a mirror with your breath). Mouth can be open or closed. If it feels OK, stay in this pose for 10 more long exhalations making the sound of *haaa*.



2. Cat/ Cow > Downward Dog

On your hands and knees, feel the sensation of your hands and lower legs on the floor. Inhale lifting your head and chest while looking up with your eyes, then exhale completely as you push the floor away with your hands, rounding your back, pulling your belly in, and tucking your chin onto your chest. As you exhale try making the *haaa* sound again with mouth open or closed. Repeat 5 times then on your next exhale try lifting your hips into Downward Facing Dog. Try to keep your arms straight; legs can be slightly bent. Shake your head; release the tension in your neck and face. Make any sounds that feel natural to release tension in your body. You might bend one leg and straighten the opposite leg, back and forth from side-to-side. Try to stay for 5-10 long exhalations. You can come down and rest in Child's Pose. Then repeat if you wish.



Yoga Sequence for Improved Sleep



3. Star Pose

Place the soles of your feet together allowing the knees to fall out to the sides. Slowly begin to fold forward until you reach your limit. Rest your chin on your chest and draw your belly in. If you have pain in your knees stretch your legs out but keep them bent. Deepen your breathing. Feel your inhale moving into your back and belly, then exhale slowly and completely. Try doing this for 10 breaths. Imagine that you are breathing into the back of your body and exhaling into the ground beneath the floor.



4. Bridge Pose

Lying on your back, bend your legs and place your feet with ankles under your knees. Feet hip distance apart, toes pointing forwards. Lift your hips. Try to walk your shoulder blades in and lengthen your arms under you. Stay for 10 breaths, or as long as you can, to tire out your thigh muscles. You might notice your legs shaking which naturally is "discharging" stress from your body. Repeat doing the pose again.



5. Reclining Twist

Lying on your back, bend your right leg (knee over your waist) and move it over to the left. Keep your upper back against the floor and reach your right arm out to the right. You can look up or turn your head to the right. Take 10 full breaths feeling your ribcage expand. Then switch to the other side. When done, draw your knees into your chest, maybe rocking side/side or making small circles with your knees to release tension in your lower back.



6. Reclined Butterfly

You can lie down in bed and maybe put a blanket over you. Place the soles of your feet together allowing the knees to fall to the side. Relax and inhale fully into your belly. Make your exhale long and complete, maybe using the *haaa* sound again. Count to 4 when you are inhaling and to 8 when you are exhaling. Try to stay for 2-3 minutes. Your legs might start shaking again to relieve the stress in your hip flexors. When done, bring your knees to the chest again to release any tension in the lower back.



7. Relaxation

Find a comfortable position lying on your back and completely relax your body. Release the weight of your arms and legs. Inhale and tense your right arm, exhale release. Continue doing the same with your left arm, then right leg, and left leg. Then tense and release both arms, then both legs. And finally tense your entire body, and as you exhale completely relax.

8. Closing - Deep Relaxation Breathing

Continuing lying on your back, eyes can be closed if that feels OK. See if you can relax your whole body and feel the weight of it sinking into the place where you are lying, particularly as you exhale. As you relax, just let your body breathe itself without controlling your inhale and exhale. Then focusing on your exhale, let it be long and breathing out completely. On your next breath, at the end of your exhale, pause to the count of 3 before inhaling deeply and repeating four more times. If it feels comfortable increase your pause to a 5 count and repeat five times. If thoughts arise, see if you can let them go and concentrate on relaxing as you extend your exhale. If for any reason this feels uncomfortable just relax and let your body breathe how it wants. Stay here as long as you wish. You may naturally fall asleep.

To learn more about the Prison Yoga Project or to support our mission, please visit www.prisonyoga.org