

BREATHING TECHNIQUES FOR INSOMNIA

Although there are a number of breathing exercises you can try to relax and fall asleep, a few basic principles apply to all of them. It's always a good idea to close your eyes, which may help you shut out distractions. Focus on your breathing and think about the healing power of your breath. Each of these different exercises has slightly different benefits. Try them and see which one is the best match for you.

4-7-8 breathing technique

Here's how to practice the 4-7-8 breathing technique:

- Allow your lips to part gently.
- Exhale completely, making a breathy whoosh sound as you do.
- Press your lips together as you silently inhale through the nose for a count of 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7 seconds.
- Exhale again for a full 8 seconds, making a whooshing sound throughout.
- Repeat 4 times when you first start. Eventually, work up to 8 repetitions.

Three-part breathing exercise

To practice the three-part breathing exercise, follow these three steps:

- Take a long, deep inhale.
- Exhale fully while focusing intently on your body and how it feels.
- After doing this a few times, slow down your exhale so that it's twice as long as you inhale.

Alternate nasal breathing exercise

Here are the steps for the alternate nasal or alternate nostril breathing exercise, also called Nadi shodhana pranayama:

- Sit with your legs crossed.
- Place your left hand on your knee and your right thumb against your nose.
- Exhale fully and then close the right nostril.
- Inhale through your left nostril.
- Open your right nostril and exhale through it while closing the left.
- Continue this rotation for 5 minutes, finishing by exhaling through your left nostril.

The Papworth method

The Papworth method combines multiple breathing techniques. You focus on your diaphragm to breathe more naturally:

- Sit up straight, perhaps in bed, if using this to fall asleep.
- Take deep, methodical breaths in and out, counting to 4 with each inhale – through your mouth or nose – and each exhale, which should be through your nose.
- Focus on your abdomen rising and falling, and listen for your breath sounds to come from your stomach.

Box breathing

During box breathing, you want to focus intently on the oxygen you bring in and push out:

- Sit with your back straight, breathe in, and then try to push all the air out of your lungs as you exhale.
- Inhale slowly through your nose and count to 4 in your head, filling your lungs with more air with each number.
- Hold your breath and count to 4 in your head.
- Slowly exhale through your mouth, focusing on getting all the oxygen out of your lungs.

Meditation has a variety of known benefits for your overall health, such as helping you find mental focus and relax. No matter which type of breathing exercise you prefer, the evidence is clear that breathing exercises can help you:

- Relax
- Sleep
- Breathe more naturally and effectively

SUMMARY

Doing these exercises before bedtime tonight can provide you immediate results in the form of a better night's sleep. Even better news: If you add them to your nighttime routine regularly, the effects will increase and your sleep will continue to improve.



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YOGA FOR
INSOMNIA

We're all told we should get more sleep. If you live with insomnia, the idea of sleeping soundly through the night may seem like a dream. You've probably already tried counting sheep backward and forward, so your next step may be to add a gentle yoga practice to your nightly routine. A Medical study found that a regular yoga practice improved sleep efficiency, total sleep time, and how quickly participants fell asleep, among other improvements for those living with insomnia. Though it may be tempting to think you should tire yourself out with intense workouts before bed, you actually want to calm your nervous system and wind down from your day.

YOGA EXERCISES TO TRY FOR INSOMNIA

FORWARD FOLD



Forward Fold is a gentle inversion. It activates your parasympathetic nervous system. This system slows down bodily processes. It will release tension and help you get to sleep.

Muscles Worked: latissimus dorsi, teres minor and major, erector spinae, gluteus maximus, hamstrings.

- Begin standing upright with your feet hip-distance apart.
- Take a deep inhale as you raise your arms up and out until they meet above your head.
- As you exhale, pull your knees up by contracting the fronts of your thighs and bend forward from the waist.
- Settle into the stretch by breathing in gently and grasping opposite elbows, letting your arms hang directly beneath your head — widen your stance if you're at all worried about balance here.
- Take in 10 to 15 slow, deep breaths before you gently rise to stand.

SUPINE TWIST



Twists in general help detox, release tension, and reduce back pain. Beyond that, it's been found that certain reclining poses help relax your baroreflex, which helps lower your blood pressure. This can assist in helping you get to and stay asleep.

Muscles Worked: glutes, erector spinae, external obliques

- Lie on your back on the mat. As you inhale, draw your knees into your chest.
- As you exhale, extend your arms out to your side at shoulder height and let your knees fall to the side, stacking your knees on top of each other. If you need or want, you can put a small cushion (like a throw pillow) under your bottom knee to support the twist.
- As you breathe into the twist, check in with your body and be sure neither shoulder blade is pulling up off the ground. If it is, you can raise your legs a little and add a cushion (or another cushion) to keep your shoulders pressing into the mat.
- Stay here for at least 5 deep breaths and lift your legs back to your chest on an inhale, pressing into your arms to help move them, and then drop them to the other side.

PUPPY POSE



Puppy Pose is a modified Child's Pose. It stretches the upper back, spine, and shoulders. This helps relieve tension and stress. The forehead on the ground also stimulates the pituitary gland, which is a major source of melatonin. Melatonin helps aid you in getting to sleep.

Muscles stretched: latissimus dorsi, teres major, rotator cuff muscles, abdominals, deltoids

1. Get into all fours on the mat, keeping your hips stacked over your knees and your shoulders stacked over your wrists.
2. Without moving your hips, begin to walk your hands out in front of you but keep your elbows off the floor.
3. As you exhale, tuck your toes under and move your buttocks about halfway to your heels and gently drop your forehead to the mat.
4. Breathe here, keeping a slight curve in your lower back and pressing your hands down and stretching through your arms and spine.
5. Stay here for 5 to 10 breaths before walking your hands back so you're on all fours again.

CHILDS POSE



Child's Pose stretches the hips, thighs, and ankles. It also passively stretches the back torso and gently relaxes the muscles of your front body. This pose reduces stress, stimulates melatonin, and calms the mind.

Muscles stretched: latissimus dorsi, lower back, shoulders, hips

- From all fours, bring your big toes together so they're touching, widen your knees to at least hip width, and then sit back on your heels.
- As you exhale, lay your torso down between your thighs. If it's more comfortable, you can widen your feet or lay a long, narrow cushion down between your legs to support your torso.
- When you are laying fully in Child's Pose, you can have your arms out in front of you, stretching, but as a follow-up to Puppy Pose, you can lay your hands alongside your torso, palms up.
- Stay here for at least 10 breaths. When you rise from it, do so as you inhale and use your hands to support you if you like.

LEGS-UP-THE-WALL POSE

Legs-Up-the-Wall is a gentle inversion. It's also completely passive, so it helps prepare your brain and body for sleep.

Muscles stretched: hamstrings and neck, front of the torso.

- Move your mat to an area of the wall with space and sit parallel to it.
- Lie down with your feet on the ground, knees bent. Resting on your lower back, lift your feet and gently swing your torso so it's perpendicular to the wall.
- Place your sitting bones up against the base of the wall and your legs up the wall. Get comfortable here, moving your torso and inching your lower back closer to the wall if need be.
- Extend your legs up the wall. (Note: Placing a cushion or folded blanket under your lower back can add to your comfort here.)
- Rest your arms out to your sides at whatever angle feels good, palms up. Stay here as long as you like, breathing deeply and releasing tension.

