

Improving Sleep with Yoga Nidra, the Yoga of Sleep



Photo by David Newkirk

Yoga Nidra is the yoga of sleep. To be more specific, Yoga Nidra is learning to wake up to your utmost nature of being. Yet, not so ironically, there are some wonderful applications in Yoga Nidra that can also help you to achieve natural, peaceful, and nourishing sleep. Let me elaborate...

The Yoga of Sleep

Yoga is an ancient term that refers to yoking all seemingly disparate parts of your being into one. This then leads us to experience the Oneness of all things, a state called [Samadhi](#). The Sankrit word, Nidra, actually refers to the liminal brain

state that is in between our dreaming and awake states. Therefore, Yoga Nidra refers to arriving at Oneness, or Samadhi, through the state of Nidra. This happens through a specific and skillfully form of guided meditation that systematically deepens your layers of Awareness. This meditation helps you to release your identity from ego, things like body, mind, emotions, etc, and begin to identify as Awareness itself. You start to see your ego as merely things to be aware of rather than identify with.

But Yoga Nidra, the yoga of sleep, is appropriately named because its super power is **relaxation**. Relaxation helps to guide practitioners into deepening layers of awareness to arrive at the beautiful marriage of form and spirit. It does this in part by blurring the fierce edges of “reality” that our rational mind has created for itself. When you relax, you can enter into a more expanded world and see things with greater clarity. If a person falls asleep during Yoga Nidra, the part of them that is listening is doing so regardless if the conscious mind is or not.

How Yoga Nidra Can Improve Sleep

In addition to being called the Yoga of Sleep, Yoga Nidra is also a great way to develop regular deep, natural, and nourishing sleep. One of the ways it does this is through simply bringing practitioners into a great sense of Awareness. [Tantra](#) philosophy (the school of thought where Yoga Nidra comes from) states that our True Nature is that of Awareness. If you can experience your True Nature through practices like Yoga Nidra, you'll find yourself more whole. As you experience

your True Self, that of Awareness, you find yourself experiencing the part of you that is synonymous with Source. There's nothing you lack or need in this state. Therefore, when you approach yourself to Source (your True Self) then any apparent lack goes away. Yoga Nidra is perhaps my favorite (and most relaxing) way of connecting to Source. If sleep is something that is troubling you, getting clear with Source is a great way to get back on track.

I've always said that wellness is the byproduct of Awareness.

Since Yoga Nidra is about deepening your Awareness, it's also true that your nature state is that of relaxed Awareness. This is a very common state of mind during Yoga Nidra. The relaxation part of Yoga Nidra is very useful to practice. It trains you to deepen your relaxation when you really need it, especially during times when you're trying to sleep. Often times, not getting good or regular sleep, or bouts of insomnia, are symptoms of other things such as imbalance in body, mind, or spirit. Your energy could be off. Your diet could be skewed. Your stress could be through the roof. Either way, if your sleep is lacking, it's an invitation to look at your life. Yoga Nidra is a great way to do just this. The practice invites us to simply be the observer of things as they are and see our lives with as much objectivity as possible. Though practicing Yoga Nidra, you might discover an imbalance or a faulty belief that is preventing you from thriving in your life and which might manifest as sleeplessness.



Resting is a skill. Like all skills, you can be good at it or bad at it. Yoga Nidra is a way of practicing the skill of relaxing. It does this in part by deepening your layers of Awareness through the different layers of your ego called [Koshas](#). You'll experience paying keen attention to body, energy, mind, beliefs and archetypes, and even your layers of joy and bliss—all as ways of learning to misidentify with them and see how they point you—u to your True Self, that of pure Awareness. The process is very relaxing. Truly, you'll experience your Both And nature, the part of you that is married as both consciousness and physicality combined. As you experience your Both And nature, you'll find yourself simultaneously relaxing deeper and deeper while also becoming more aware.

Yoga Nidra helps you to simply welcome, recognize and witness without opinions. Often times we get worked up when we can't sleep. We find ourselves not sleeping and then get stressed about not sleeping, increasing our anxiety and making it even harder to sleep. Yoga Nidra helps you practice allowing things to be just as they are, neither good nor bad, but witnessing whatever is as mere information. Even sleeplessness. You can

rest blissfully in a sleepless state simply being curious about sleeplessness rather than getting worked up over the fact that you've got a big day tomorrow and it's 2 am and you still haven't fallen asleep. Also, it's said that Yoga Nidra is the rest equivalent of 4x sleep, so 30 minutes of Yoga Nidra is like a solid 2-hour nap. Even if you're not sleeping, you can rest assured that you're still getting some great rest.

Some things to consider regarding sleep

Your mind is a processing machine. It's a computer. The brain isn't very good about distinguishing between real events, scenes it sees on a screen like a movie, and things it pictures as images in your mind. If you're laying there in bed, replaying the horrible things that could happen tomorrow over and over again in your mind, your brain is releasing the same fight or flight chemicals it would if you were literally in that situation. Instead, you can use one of the tools I often use in Yoga Nidra to help people tap into the rest and digest part of the nervous system. Because our mind isn't great about differentiating scenes in the mind vs. scenes in reality, you can visualize peaceful scenes and release the same rest and digest chemicals in your brain as if you were literally in that scene, experiencing all that bliss. You get to make your own bliss. You simply tap into your senses and visualize as if seeing through your own eyes, smelling with your own nose, hearing with your own ears, all the things you'd see in your oasis of peace. This will help you to begin to relax and stop sending cortisol (stress hormone) through your system when you should be going to sleep.

To help your mind wind down before bed, you can also simply find a focus. Because the brain is meant to process, give your mind something simple and singular to process before going to bed rather than defaulting to process the worst-case-scenario of could happen tomorrow. Start counting your breaths down from 100. Exhale and think 100, inhale think 99, exhale 98, etc. It's incredible how easily your mind will relax when it can focus on something simple. This works miracles.

Good Sleep Hygiene

You may consider a few tips to help you train your body to receive regular, deep, and nourishing [sleep](#).

- Develop a sleep schedule. Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day. Plan on a full 7–9 hours of sleep, even if you think you can get away with less.
- Have a bed-time ritual. Plan on winding down before bed and that means avoiding screens, big emotions, and drama before bed. Do some light reading with dim lights and some camomile tea.
- Avoid blue lights, fluorescents, and LED lights. All of these kinds of lights emit the kind of light that your body recognizes in sunlight and it messes up your circadian rhythm.
- Monitor your caffeine. You may think that caffeine is not causing you any problems but it can stay in your system for up to 48 hours and even if it doesn't prevent you from falling asleep, it can prevent you from going into deep sleep, or staying asleep.

Please enjoy a [free Yoga Nidra recording](#) designed to help you practice getting relaxed and practice deep, peaceful and nourishing sleep.



Photo by Alex Adams

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