MEDITATION

If insomnia is the root of your sleepless nights, it may be worth trying meditation. The deep relaxation technique has been shown to increase sleep time, improve sleep quality and make it easier to fall (and stay) asleep. Here is a list of some key facts about meditation that may help you get over any hesitation about trying it.

• It’s safe. Meditation can be a great tool for those looking for an all-natural, medication-free way to treat insomnia. In fact, meditation has even been shown to help reduce the use of sleeping pills. The practice likely improves insomnia symptoms by reducing measures of arousal in the brain. And there are no associated risks or side effects to trying meditation.

• It can be used with other sleep techniques. Combining cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) with mindfulness meditation has been shown to improve sleep better than CBT-I alone.

• There are multiple health benefits. Not only can meditation improve your sleep quality but it may also help reduce blood pressure, and ease pain, anxiety and depression.

• It’s easy. Meditation is an accessible, budget-friendly practice that everyone can try. Insomnia sufferers of different ages respond well to the practice, including older adults. Though you can pay for meditative classes and books that teach you the practice, you also can search online for free apps and YouTube videos if you’d like to try it before spending money on it.

YOGA

Yoga isn’t just beneficial for improving core strength, flexibility and stress levels; it also can help you sleep better—especially if you experience insomnia. When people who have insomnia perform yoga on a daily basis, they sleep longer, fall asleep faster and return to sleep more quickly.
This is also true for older people who have insomnia. Those who are 60 and older experience better sleep quality, sleep longer and feel better during the day when they perform regular yoga.

This benefit can be seen in all sorts of situations where people have trouble sleeping. For example, pregnant women who start a mindful yoga practice in their second trimester sleep better and wake up less often throughout the night. In addition, cancer patients sleep better if they do yoga (90 percent of cancer patients experience insomnia symptoms while receiving treatment).

If you want to work yoga into your bedtime routine, it’s important to do the right kind. Some types of yoga can be energizing (such as hot yoga and vigorous vinyasa flow) or restorative (such as Hatha and nidra), which will not help you relax. The following are three poses that are ideal for preparing your body for sleep:

- **Legs Up the Wall:** Lie on the ground on your back and put the back of your legs up a wall (keep your legs straight), so your body is in an L-shaped pose. Relax into the position, hold it for at least 30 seconds and focus on your breathing.

- **Lying Butterfly:** Lie on the ground on your back. Press the bottoms of your feet against each other and let your knees fall out to the sides. You can put a pillow under your knees if this feels too strenuous.

- **Corpse Pose:** Lie on the ground on your back with legs straight, arms by sides and palms facing up. Breathe slowly, focusing on your inhales and exhales.

### BREATHING EXERCISE

Close your eyes and notice your breathing. Turn all your attention to your natural breathing pattern and feel the air enter and leave your nose or mouth. Visualize the flow of air as it passes through your mouth, airways, down into your belly and back out again. Survey your body for any tension and, as you exhale, feel the tension leave that part of your body. Visualize your breath reaching your forehead, neck, shoulders, arms ... and then releasing the tension as you exhale. If your mind wanders to another worry or thought, let it go and gently redirect your attention back to your breathing.

### GUIDED IMAGERY

The idea in this exercise is to focus your attention on an image or story so that your mind can let go of worries or thoughts that keep you awake.

Get into a comfortable position in bed. Close your eyes and relax. Begin to visualize a scene, memory or story that you find calming. This is highly individual—find what works best for you by trying a few choices. For example, a favorite vacation or calming outdoor spot; a relaxing activity like curling up with a book in your favorite chair; or something repetitive like remembering the steps of an exercise or dance routine. The key is to find something that allows you to focus your attention and let go of other thoughts.

Begin to create this scenario in your mind. Visualize all the details of the image or story, as slowly and carefully as you can. Any time you find your mind drifting to an unrelated thought (a worry about the day or a “must do” for tomorrow), acknowledge it and let it go. Turn your mind’s eye back to your relaxing story. It’s okay if this takes time before it works; each time you practice you will get better at it.

Here are some additional tips to follow if you have difficulty sleeping:

- Turn off electronics and rotate your clock away from you (don’t watch the clock or check your phone if you can’t sleep).
- Try not to worry if you can’t fall asleep, and remind yourself that your body will eventually take over and help you sleep.
- If you are awake for more than 20 minutes in bed, move to a different part of the house (one without bright lights).
- Do something relaxing for a while, until you begin to feel tired and return to bed.