

Meditation for Better Sleep

As a relaxation technique, meditation can quiet the mind and body while enhancing inner peace. When done before bedtime, meditation may help reduce insomnia and sleep troubles by promoting overall calmness. I encourage everyone reading this to give it a try, it could be just what you need to get a better night's sleep! Keep checking in to our Trainer Tidbit series for more healthy information! ~ [Andrea Grimes](#) ~ [FitRec Personal Trainer](#)

Meditation may also:

- increase melatonin (the sleep hormone)
- increase serotonin (precursor of melatonin)
- reduce heart rate
- decrease blood pressure
- activate parts of the brain that control sleep



Below are some tips to help you start a meditation practice and enjoy a more peaceful nights sleep:

- **Sit for just two minutes.** Start with just two minutes a day for a week. If that goes well, increase by another two minutes and do that for a week. See if you can get up to 10 minutes a day!
- **Check in with how you're feeling.** As you settle into your meditation, check to see how you're feeling. How does your body feel? What is the quality of your mind? Busy? Tired? Anxious? Know that all of these feelings are ok.
- **Count your breaths.** Try counting "one" as you take in the first breath, then "two" as you breathe out. Repeat this to the count of 10, then start again at one.
- **Come back when you wander.** Your mind will wander and that's ok. When you notice your mind wandering, smile, and simply gently return to your breath. Count "one" again, and start over.
- **Don't worry about clearing the mind.** Lots of people think meditation is about clearing your mind, or stopping all thoughts. It's not. This can sometimes happen, but it's not the "goal" of meditation.
- **Do a body scan.** Once you become a little better at following your breath, focus your attention on one body part at a time. Start at the soles of your feet — how do those feel? Slowly move to your toes, the tops of your feet, your ankles, all the way to the top of your head.

Follow guided meditation. If it helps, you can try following guided meditations to start with. My favorites are Headspace (for a monthly/annual charge) and Insight Timer (which is free).

Along with your daily meditation routine you can start a nightly routine of light stretching and breathwork. Below are some tips to get started:



Breathwork:

Belly Breathing: Helps strengthen your diaphragm, an important muscle that helps you breathe. Belly breathing has a ton of benefits including helping with depression and anxiety, sleeplessness and stress.

Here's How:

1. Sit in a comfortable position or lie flat on the floor, your bed, or another comfortable, flat surface.
2. Relax your shoulders.
3. Put a hand on your chest and a hand on your stomach.
4. Breathe in through your nose for about two seconds. You should experience the air moving through your nostrils into your abdomen, making your stomach expand. During this type of breathing, make sure your stomach is moving outward while your chest remains relatively still.
5. Purse your lips (as if you're about to drink through a straw), press gently on your stomach, and exhale slowly for about two seconds.
6. Repeat these steps several times for best results.

Benefits of Stretching for Sleep: Developing an evening stretching routine helps your body to enter a relaxed state more quickly, and stay in a deeper sleep for longer. Practices like yoga and stretching can be incredibly relaxing and meditative. Focusing on your body and the present actions can be a great way to separate yourself from the day's stresses and signal to your subconscious to stop worrying.

Here's How: From lying on the floor or your bed.

Knee to chest: Bend one leg and place both hands on the knee. Bring your knee to your chest. Hold for a couple of breaths and repeat on the other side.

Spinal Twist: Laying on your back, extend both arms long, like the letter T, so that your hands are in line with your shoulders. Slowly cross your left leg across the right side of your body and naturally allow the leg to fall towards the ground. To deepen the stretch turn your head towards the left. Hold for a few breaths and then repeat on the other side.

Reclined Butterfly Pose: Laying on your back, Bring the soles of your feet to touch. Allow the knees to bend and the hips to open. You can always place pillows under your knees if they feel tight. Bring one hand to your stomach and one hand to your heart and begin to notice your breath. Hold for 5-10 belly breaths.

