



Yoga for Sleep: Yoga Nidra 101

By Megan Edwards
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When you envision a soothing bedtime activity, yoga might not be the first thing that comes to mind. Images of handstands and hyper-flexibility might flash before your eyes—the exact opposite of the relaxation you’re seeking when it’s time to fall asleep. Contrary to the popularized images of yoga we see on social media, there are several different styles of yoga that can help lull a busy mind into a state of deep restfulness. Gentle practices such as yoga nidra are excellent tools for people with insomniatic tendencies because they use the natural power of [deep diaphragmatic breathing](#), guided meditation, and relaxing postures to help you drift off to dreamland.

Forks Over Knives spoke with two yoga nidra experts about the wealth of benefits this meditation-oriented practice can offer people who experience poor sleep. If you’re ready to stop tossing and turning, learn how to use yoga nidra for sleep and give this subtly powerful practice a try the next time you want to catch some quality Z’s.

In this article, we’ll explore:

- [What Is Yoga Nidra?](#)
- [What Does a Yoga Nidra Practice Involve?](#)
- [How Does Yoga Nidra Help with Sleep?](#)
- [Are There Any Risks of Practicing Yoga Nidra?](#)
- [Yoga Nidra Sleep Meditations](#)

What Is Yoga Nidra?

Translated from Sanskrit, yoga nidra means “yogic sleep” or “divine sleep.” Unlike its movement-based counterparts, this yogic practice typically involves a single relaxing posture (such as lying on your back) so that you can focus on tapping into your breath and progressively relaxing your body.

“Yoga nidra is a meditative process that, through connecting with the deepest levels of rest, allows us to connect with our most natural state,” explains Jamie Marich, PhD, a clinical trauma specialist and founder of the [Institute for Creative Mindfulness](#). “Yoga nidra is fundamentally about sinking into a place of non-doing and just being. We release the effort of poses to embrace a sense of total ease.”

While it’s common for new yoga nidra practitioners to fall asleep during the practice, entering a true state of yoga nidra requires you to remain conscious.

“In ordinary deep sleep, also known as dreamless sleep, we enter an unconscious state,” says Sadhana Pezet, a yoga therapist and co-founder of [Shatarasa Yoga Darshana](#). “Yoga nidra trains a particular capacity to remain conscious [during deep relaxation]. This does not mean that the mind is active during your practice; in a genuine yoga nidra state, all activity and movement of the mind recedes. This is what makes yoga nidra such a deeply healing practice and a wonderful training for entering a meditative state.”

The ultimate goal of a yoga nidra practice is to fully relax your brain so your nervous system can rest, your mind can let go of stress, and your physical body can release tension.

What Does a Yoga Nidra Practice Involve?

While every yoga nidra session looks a little different, there are fundamental characteristics of this soothing practice that remain constant so the body and mind can grow accustomed to entering a state of deep relaxation.

“Yoga nidra is traditionally done lying down to allow for optimal comfort and release of the effort of doing,” says Marich. “However, since nidra is, above all, a state of

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being, it can be done sitting up or in another comfortable position.”

Once you’ve found a comfy posture to rest in, the instructor will gently lead you through a guided meditation that will help the mind slow down.

“A general relaxation of the body and mind is induced, along with full breath awareness, centered on deep belly breaths,” explains Pezet. “This is followed by guiding the practitioner’s consciousness throughout their body, usually pausing in the centers of subtle energy, also known as chakras.”

A yoga nidra practice can last anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes and is safe to do on a daily basis. While it’s possible to enter a yoga nidra state on your own, both Marich and Pezet recommend starting with a skilled teacher.

“The depth of experience that can surface during a session requires skillful guidance at first,” says Pezet. “The verbal guidance is minimal, as few softly spoken words as possible. No flowery or imaginary interjections that keep the mind engaged. The facilitator seeks to be as unobtrusive and as invisible as possible to enable the practitioner to enter a very deep state of stillness and yet also feel safe.”

If you can’t find a yoga nidra instructor near you, there’s a wealth of free recordings on YouTube that can introduce you to this practice (and we’ve included some further down [in this article](#)).

“Although practitioners can learn to bring themselves into this state, I find that listening to a facilitator really helps me to fully release and let go of any remaining effort by letting someone else guide me,” says Marich.

Yoga Nidra Benefits

A growing body of research shows that yoga nidra can be an effective tool for [reducing stress and anxiety](#), [balancing hormones](#), and [managing pain](#), but the most common issue it’s sought to improve is [insomnia](#). The deeply relaxed state of yoga nidra taps into the parasympathetic nervous system—the branch of your autonomic nervous system that helps you rest, digest, and heal—so that sleep, and relaxation in general, becomes easier to enter the more you practice.

“Yoga nidra can bring us into specific brain wave states, namely delta wave connection, that are associated with the deepest levels of rest and stress relief,” explains Marich, adding that yoga nidra is not so much about falling asleep but rather, coming to that ‘sweet spot’ just before sleep when stresses are released.

Apart from relaxing the nervous system and ushering in healing brain wave states, the spiritual component of yoga nidra can also be beneficial for [improving sleep](#). Pezet explains that in yogic philosophy, humans are viewed as having several different “bodies” or layers of self: The physical body is associated with the waking state of consciousness, the energetic body (which encompasses thoughts and emotions) is connected to the dream state of sleep, and the causal body (which is related to your subconscious and true spirit) is paired with the dreamless state of deep sleep. Yoga nidra is said to access this third “body,” allowing all the stressors, traumas, and fears that can become embedded in our mind to be gently examined and released.

“The practice is refreshing to the psyche and rejuvenating to the body as all your systems are rested and restored for optimal functioning,” Pezet says. “Because the buildup of stress in the body is released, yoga nidra gives us the ability to meet life’s challenges with a more skillful presence.”

Are There Any Risks of Practicing Yoga Nidra?

Yoga nidra is a safe and gentle practice that has very few contraindications. However, if you have a mental illness or suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, experts strongly recommend practicing under the guidance of a skilled instructor, as you may need guidance to navigate emotions that arise during the practice. Pezet adds that people who experience seizures should only engage in yoga nidra with the help of a guide because certain exercises, such as progressively tensing and releasing muscles, can be problematic. Lastly, people who are 16 weeks or more into pregnancy would want to find a different position than lying flat on their back to do the practice.

Yoga Nidra for Sleep: 3 Guided Meditations to Try

Curious to give yoga nidra a try? Play one of these

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meditations as you're winding down for the evening and notice whether you drift off to dreamland a little bit easier.

25-Minute Trauma-Informed Yoga Nidra Practice

This recording from Marich takes you through a bite-size version of a general yoga nidra practice so you can experience deep peace no matter what challenges might be present in your life.

30-Minute Yoga Nidra Journey Through the Chakras

This soothing practice is guided by [Kamini Desai](#), who has over 30 years of experience teaching yoga and lecturing on ancient wisdoms and whom Marich cites as one of her most influential teachers. In this recording, you'll take a progressive journey through your body to relax deeper and deeper until you feel fully at peace.

45-Minute Yoga Nidra for Expression and Creativity

Marich leads this meditation, which she says is ideal for anyone who feels stuck in their creative expression or sense of identity, but it can be nourishing regardless of wherever you are in life.