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LISTEN TO SLEEP

WITH ERIK IRELAND



Relax Your Mind



Benefits of guided sleep meditation. What is guided sleep meditation. Is it ok to fall asleep during guided meditation.

Regularly sleeping fewer than seven hours per night increases the risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, unhealthy eating habits that can lead to other chronic illnesses. Sleep deprivation can cause impairments in short and long term memory, decision making, attention, and reaction time. People who are sleep deprived also tend to make more errors at work and drive more dangerously on the road. Increased and better sleep, on the other hand, can lower levels of stress, and improve mental clarity and memory. Improved sleep also affects our immune systems, encourages better eating habits and weight management. Better sleep has even been linked to reducing the risk of Alzheimer's.

Studies regularly connect improved sleep with providing a greater sense of wellbeing. Why might you choose to meditate before bed? Especially if you have insomnia or difficulty falling asleep, meditation has been shown to improve the quality and efficiency of sleep, how quickly you fall asleep, and how long you can stay awake during the day. Completing a meditation for sleep before bed can help you to fall asleep faster; once asleep, you're likely to sleep more soundly, too. Meditation for quality sleep – during the day. Sleep falls into a unique category in that good quality Zzzs require much more than doing a simple meditation in bed. Restful sleep largely depends on having a rested mind, and so the preparation can begin with your mindset... during the day. More often than not, our issues around sleep are rooted in our thinking processes. Headspace's 30-day Sleep course (available only to Headspace subscribers), for example, isn't designed to send you to sleep in the moment; it's designed to change your relationship with sleep. By gradually training the mind in a specific way – day by day, for a month – you gradually create an environment conducive to a good night's rest. It's recommended that the 30-day Sleep course be used during the day, in conjunction with the single sleep meditation at bedtime. The course trains the mind for long-term, sustainable change; the single meditation is a specific exercise to send you to sleep. What to expect when meditating to fall asleep. Meditation for sleep should be approached the same way we approach meditation in the daytime: gently, with a relaxed focus. When we allow the body to relax, and allow the mind to drift off, we do so in a soft, gentle way, not trying to force sleep, otherwise we encourage more thoughts and, possibly, some tension. As much as possible, allow yourself to be led by the guidance, not thinking too much about the technique or instructions. Before you begin your sleep meditation: lie flat on your back on the bed, take a few deep breaths, and close your eyes, allowing the body to begin powering down. If you're using a guided meditation, follow the instructions. If practicing unguided meditation, progress at your own pace. The more you practice this type of meditation, the more likely you are to build a quiet and restful mind that can sleep at ease. Guided sleep meditations generally employ a number of different techniques: Breathing exercises. This involves regulating your breath – counting breaths, for example – and eventually slowing your breathing down a bit, which signals to the body that it's time for sleep. Mindful body scanning. As you lie on your bed, you may be asked to notice the breath and the places where your body is touching your bed. Then, starting at the toes, you can think of "switching off" any effort in each part of your body, part by part. Visualizations. A visualization asks you to imagine an image or scene, then it takes you into a mental state that is similar to hypnosis. Gratitude. Some sleep-focused meditation programs focus on appreciation meditation and loving kindness meditation, which ask you to focus on gratitude. Counting. To slow the mind down and release you from cyclical patterns of thought, you may be invited to count slowly; starting at 10 (or even 1,000) counting backwards to one, then starting at 10 again. Silence. A narrator or guide may ask you to lie calmly in silence for up to a few minutes, providing very little guidance, as a way to focus after a long and busy day. Movement-based meditation. If you're being guided through a sleep-based meditation in person, you may be invited to participate in mindful movement practices like tai chi, low-impact postures or light stretching. Retracing your day. Reviewing your day, in detail, action-by-action, can be a great way to distract your mind just enough to drift off. Starting from getting up in the morning, through showering and having breakfast, spend 20-25 seconds on each of the day's events, however small. This is great way to begin powering down, before a breathing or visualization meditation. A simple meditation to aid sleep. If you wake up in the night, racing thoughts can contribute to keeping you awake. Your mind is whirring away, worrying about all kinds of things that might happen. A simple meditation based on counting the breaths can really help. Start by scanning down through your body, looking for areas of tension and relaxation. Then begin counting your breaths, (1 for an in-breath, 2 for an out-breath, 3 for an in-breath and so on, up to 10). If your mind wanders, just bring it back to counting your breath. The idea is to step away from the worried thinking, and give your mind a different object to concentrate on for a while so you can fall back asleep. Share Pin Tweet Plus Email Unwinding after a long, busy day isn't easy, and curling up in bed with a smartphone or laptop won't help. Start by shutting off all your blue-lit devices—minus the one playing this video, of course (no need to watch, just listen). Once you've literally disconnected, your mental activity will naturally begin to slow. Lie down under the covers, stretch your legs, and rest your palms on your stomach or by your head. Take three deep breaths. If your mind is wandering, it's no big deal. Just take notice and return your thoughts to your breath, letting the inhaled and exhaled guide you into a calm, deeply relaxed state. Related: A 90-Second Solution to Sleep Better Tonight By Lodro Rinzler Published on July 27, 2015 TAGS: guided meditations, Lodro Rinzler, meditation Few things in life are more frustrating than lying awake at night, unable to sleep. Dragging yourself out of bed after a long night of tossing and turning can be demoralizing, to say the least, and nights like this can leave you exhausted. If you've been spending the night staring at your ceiling instead of snoozing, one potential remedy could be meditation. But how does it work? We turned to two meditation specialists, Dr. Darshan Mehta, Medical Director of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine, and Andy Puddicombe, Headspace co-founder and meditation expert, for their insight. What is meditation? "Top-line, [meditation] is a way of looking after and caring for the mind," says Puddicombe. "It isn't about turning off your thoughts entirely, but observing the thoughts you have. You don't have to achieve any particular state of mind to be meditating correctly. Our job is to show up and witness the mind as it is, knowing that what we are looking for is already here," says Puddicombe. "Not that we need to try and somehow intellectually create that idea of peace in our mind." Meditation isn't about turning off thoughts entirely, but rather observing them as they come. Getty Images stock Keep in mind that there are lots of different ways to meditate and one doesn't necessarily trump the others. "Culturally speaking, it has origins in many, many different religious and spiritual traditions around the world," says Mehta. Popular forms of meditation include mindfulness or calming meditation, insight meditation or Vipassana meditation, and transcendental meditation. Mindfulness meditation is intended to create a quieter, more peaceful mind while insight meditation aims to develop particular qualities like wisdom or compassion. Transcendental meditation is a popular branch of meditation founded on the techniques of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. For more like this, follow TMRW on Instagram at @tmrwtoday. What are the benefits of meditation? "We've learned many of these practices do have health benefits associated with them – from improving symptoms of anxiety and depression to reducing blood pressure and having better control of other metabolic parameters," Mehta says of the scientifically proven side effects of meditation. Science has yet to pinpoint which types of meditation can help with which specific issues patients are facing, but Mehta believes this knowledge will be the next frontier in clinical meditation studies. "In the next five years, we should be able to 'prescribe' the form or type of meditation that might be best served for that individual, for that symptom," he explains. Can meditation help you sleep? If so, how? "When we feel stressed, our bodies go into a physiological response called 'fight or flight.' In this state of hypervigilance, the body makes you stay awake because it fears danger. If you can release stress in your life and practice a calm mind, you'll find yourself falling asleep much easier. A lot of people I know get very anxious and fearful around sleep," says Puddicombe. "All that thinking does is make us feel more stressed and less likely to go to sleep. Both experts agree meditation can help with sleep, but maybe not in the way you'd imagine – it's not like turning on some quiet music or white noise before you tuck yourself in. Most people assume mindfulness meditation will be done immediately before sleep," says Puddicombe. In actuality, he notes, "Most of the mindfulness research gets people to meditate first thing in the morning." Meditation benefits our ability to sleep by setting up a calmer mind, decreasing the stress response, regulating circadian rhythms and allowing us to approach sleep differently. What is the best way to meditate for better sleep? While traditional meditation should help, Mehta also recommends yoga nidra, or yoga for sleep, as a popular form of meditation for people who struggle to get rest at night. "It is a series of practices that permit sleep," Mehta explains of the guided practice. "Most of it is intentional relaxation of the muscle groups and ultimately finding a space of equanimity." Yoga nidra involves intentionally relaxing each part of the body, and it can help promote sleep. Getty Images stock Unlike other meditative practices, Mehta advises it's best to practice yoga nidra when you're trying to go to bed: "The best way to describe it is a body scan. You are sort of scanning different parts of the body, but you are really going into intentional relaxation from one point of the body to another." Early research suggests yoga nidra can help to reduce one's feelings of stress and anxiety and that it may help improve the quality of sleep in those suffering from insomnia. The Headspace app also has an entire channel dedicated to sleep that includes guided meditation exercises and more immediate sleep aids like calming music. Long story short, all of the health benefits you receive from meditation will play into your body's ability to get a better night of rest. I want to try meditating, but where do I start? "Start small," says Puddicombe. "It's more about frequency than it is duration." Puddicombe recommends meditating for 10 minutes a day to receive the maximum benefits from the activity, although he says it's best to work your way up to that amount of time. If you are new to meditation, even 3 to 5 minutes a day will make a difference. In the beginning, Puddicombe suggests connecting meditation to something you do every day. If you have a cup of coffee every morning before leaving the house, use that as a reminder to take a few minutes to meditate. Getty Images stock "Let's say you shower every morning or you have a cup of coffee every morning, tie it to one of those things," says Puddicombe. "Once you tie meditation to it, you are more likely to remember to do it." Mehta also recommends asking for professional advice if you're having trouble getting started. "The biggest reason people come to see us is for sleep," he says. "Having some guidance is important and then it can be self-sustainable. You need to talk to your health care provider about this, having open conversations." For more on meditation, check out:

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