

## **A Yoga Therapy Perspective on Insomnia**

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### **Medical View**

Insomnia is common condition in which an individual has difficulty sleeping. Some people have difficulty falling asleep, some have difficulty staying asleep, while others experience both. Insomnia can be mild or severe, lasting for short periods or for many years. For many, insomnia has become conditioned over time. Statistics indicate that one in 10 adults suffer from chronic insomnia. Women are more likely to have difficulty sleeping than men, while elderly individuals are more likely to have insomnia than younger people.

Insomnia is multi-factorial and is often influenced by a number of the following risk factors:

- high levels of stress
- depression and anxiety disorders
- grief
- lower income
- shift work and irregular schedules – circadian rhythm disorders
- travelling long distances with time changes – circadian rhythm disorders
- being over 60 years old
- being menopausal
- having an inactive lifestyle
- being overweight
- sleeping with a partner who is restless, snores, has sleep apnea
- medical conditions such as sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, an overactive thyroid
- caffeine and alcohol consumption
- use of drugs such as pseudoephedrine (a nasal decongestant and stimulant), non-prescription diet pills, over the counter pain relievers that contain caffeine, stimulating prescription drugs like asthma inhalers, prednisone, and some anti-depressants

Some complications of insomnia include:

- fatigue and sleepiness
- anxiety and ongoing concerns about an inability to sleep
- psychiatric problems such as depression or anxiety disorders
- reduced energy and vitality
- impaired immune system function
- increased risk and severity of long-term diseases, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes
- difficulty paying attention or focusing on tasks
- lower performance on the job or at school
- slowed reaction time while driving and higher risk of accidents
- tension headaches
- gastrointestinal problems
- difficulty losing weight; obesity

There are two types of insomnia. The most common type is Comorbid or secondary insomnia, sleeplessness which results from another problem. Secondary insomnia is often a symptom of an emotional, neurological or other medical disorder, or from substance use, for example:

- depression
- anxiety
- post traumatic stress disorder
- Alzheimer's disease
- Parkinson's disease
- chronic pain, such as with arthritis
- breathing difficulties, such as asthma
- an overactive thyroid
- gastrointestinal disorders, such as heartburn
- sleep disorders, such as restless legs syndrome or sleep apnea
- menopause symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats
- certain medicines, including some allergy and cold, and heart medicines-
- use of stimulants such as caffeine
- use of alcohol and other sedatives

Secondary insomnia will often improve once the causal problem is corrected. For example, if someone is sensitive to caffeine, removing coffee and medications that have caffeine in them may be enough to stop the insomnia. Some individuals may need professional counselling and therapy, particularly if more serious problems such as substance abuse are involved. People who suffer from medical conditions that affect their sleep may have considerable difficulty resolving the problem.

Primary insomnia, which is less common than secondary, doesn't result from another medical problem. This form of insomnia typically lasts for at least a month. It is usually triggered by a major or long-lasting stressor, or significant emotional upset, such as the death of a loved-one. Shift work and jet lag can disrupt the regular sleep routine and trigger an episode with primary insomnia. Primary insomnia may be more challenging to overcome than secondary.

### **Treatment for Insomnia**

**Behavioral Therapies** For many people, insomnia is a result of poor sleep habits. Learning and adopting new sleep behaviors and ways to improve the sleeping environment are often effective at restoring restful sleep. Behavioral therapies are generally recommended as the first line of treatment for insomnia. The University of Maryland Medical Center recommends the following changes:

#### **Lifestyle changes:**

- Establish a fixed bedtime and awakening time, helping to condition the body to a regular sleep schedule.
- Avoid long naps during the day. A short 30 minute nap late in the afternoon may be fine for some people, especially if they are elderly, under considerable stress, are ill or overly fatigued.

- Avoid alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime. Alcohol may have an immediate sleep-inducing effect, but that sleep is not as deep as regular sleep. Plus, a few hours later when alcohol levels in the blood start to fall, there is a stimulant or wake-up effect.
- Avoid caffeine 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- Avoid heavy, spicy, or sugary foods 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- Exercise regularly, but not within 2 hours before bedtime
- Avoid stimulating activities for 2 hours before bed, e.g. watching television, computer work, reading stimulating novels.

### Sleeping Environment

- Have a comfortable mattress and bedding.
- Sleep in a cool room with comfortably warm (but not too hot) bedding.
- Eliminate distracting noises and light. If it isn't possible to do this, make other adjustments such as ear plugs or an eye mask.
- Reserve the bed for sleep and sex. Avoid using the bed as an office or recreation area. Condition your body by associating the bed with sleep and sex.

### Preparing for bed

- Enjoy a light snack before bed, for example warm milk and a small banana, both of which are high in tryptophan.
- Practice relaxation techniques before bed such as yoga, deep breathing, listening to quiet music. Avoid taking your worries to bed.
- Establish a pre-sleep ritual, e.g. a warm bath, a few minutes reading non-stimulating material (e.g. poetry, spiritual books)
- If you don't fall asleep within 15-30 minutes, get up, go into another room, and do something non-stimulating until sleepy.

### Getting Up in the Middle of the Night

People commonly wake up once or twice a night for various reasons. If unable to get back to sleep within 15 – 20 minutes, get out of bed, leave the bedroom, and do something non-stimulating, e.g. reading, having a light snack, take a warm shower. Avoid any stimulating or challenging activity such as house cleaning, office work, watching TV, doing computer work.

**Medications** When lifestyle changes are ineffective, doctors will often recommend sleep medications. Ideally, these medications are for short-term or occasional use only, in conjunction with lifestyle changes. Examples include Ambien (Zolpidem) and Sonata (Zalepon) which allow normal sleep with few risks or side effects. Unfortunately, these drugs are expensive, so people often rely on benzodiazepenes such as diazepam (Valium), alprazolam (Xanax) and temazepam (Restoril). Although relatively inexpensive, these drugs have more side-effects, including a higher risk of dependency and anxiety if discontinued abruptly.

Although doctors usually don't recommend non-prescription sleep medications, they are a common choice for people with insomnia (e.g. Nytol, Sleep-Eez, Sominex). According to Dr. Peter Van Houten, M.D. and author of "Healing Therapies for Overcoming Insomnia", most of the liquid over-the-counter sleep drugs use alcohol as a main ingredient. They will cause sleepiness followed by disrupted sleep. Other over the counter sleeping medications contain

antihistamines such as diphenhydramine, which are sedating but do not result in normal sleep patterns. Other medications combine diphenhydramine with pain relievers (e.g. anacin P.M., Excedrin P.M. and Tylenol P.M.)

Melatonin is another common choice for insomniacs. Dr. Van Houten states that good evidence to support its use is still lacking and doesn't recommend its use for typical insomnia treatment. There are no consistent standards for melatonin dosage. Some research suggests that 0.3 mg may be the most effective dosage in many people with insomnia. Melatonin may also keep some people awake and may cause mental impairment, severe headaches, and nightmares. It may be beneficial in the case of jet lag, however, when travelers are taking long trips and crossing at least five time zones. The amino acid tryptophan can also help to induce sleep, however its effectiveness is variable. Valerian root is another herbal product, but as with many such alternatives, dosage and purity are hard to verify.

Unfortunately, many prescription and non-prescription remedies have side-effects ranging from drowsiness in the morning to more severe problems such as blurred vision, allergies, cognitive impairment, respiratory problems, diarrhea, gastro-intestinal problems, depression, and mood changes. Elderly people and pregnant women should be particularly cautious and be sure to consult with their doctors before taking any sleep medications.

### **Yogic Perspective on Insomnia**

*And if tonight my soul may find her peace  
in sleep, and sink in good oblivion  
and in the morning wake like a new-opened flower  
then I have been dipped again in God, and new-created.  
~D.H. Lawrence*

*“There exists in every person a place that is free from disease, that never feels pain, that cannot age or die. When you go to this place, limitations which all of us accept cease to exist. They are not even entertained as a possibility. This is the place called perfect health.”*

*(“Perfect Health” by D. Chopra; pg. 7)*

A good night sleep is critical to health and to physical, emotional, and spiritual balance. Unfortunately, insomnia is a common and often debilitating problem. From a yogic perspective, insomnia is symptomatic of imbalance in the body's interconnected physical and energetic systems. Pranic energy, the life force that enlivens and keeps our bodies healthy, can become blocked, stagnant, and impure as a result of various lifestyle choices, physical and emotional challenges, or medical concerns. Normally, good sleep enhances prana, allowing it to re-energize and repair the body systems. Poor sleep has the opposite effect, weakening the pranamyakosha, challenging its ability to distribute prana effectively and to maintain a healthy balance in the body. A vicious circle is created when imbalance impairs sleep, which in turn exacerbates imbalance.

Physically, our anamyakosha is affected by numerous factors that contribute to insomnia, for example:

- an improper diet for the dosha, an overly acidic diet, ingesting excess stimulants (e.g. coffee, alcohol, sugar)
- improper use of drugs and/or supplements. Medicine and herbal remedies do not contain prana, so, although they may be helpful for certain conditions (including insomnia), they will not provide a true cure. People can also become dependent on medications and suffer side effects that exacerbate imbalance.
- medical conditions such as sleep apnea and restless leg syndrome (also symptoms of imbalance)
- a lifestyle inconsistent with dosha, e.g. a Vata who has irregular work shifts in a noisy or cold environment or a Kapha who lives in a dark, cold basement apartment
- living “out of synch” with rhythms and cycles of nature, e.g. consistently going to bed after midnight (in pitta time period) and rising late morning (in kapha time period).
- exercising our bodies improperly, e.g. *anga bhanga sadhana* (“limb-harmful-practice” such as over-exertion, not honouring injuries or illness.)
- excess stress or anxiety (also symptomatic of imbalance)
- trauma

Factors such as these also impact on prana, creating low frequency, impure negative energies that further afflict the pranamyakosha and all other sheaths, as well. Another vicious cycle is created in the manomyakosha when negative energies compel negative thinking and subjugation to detrimental samskaras, which in turn creates more negative energy. A major sleep disruptor is a mind that worries, dwells on the past or future, obsesses, creates “mountains out of mole hills”, all symptoms of negative energy.

Imbalanced and blocked energies also impact on the chakra system. An Ajna imbalance, and associated pineal imbalance, is particularly problematic with regards to insomnia. The pineal gland produces melatonin, a hormone that effects the modulation of sleeping and waking patterns. An imbalanced Ajna may also create central nervous system problems, which in turn impact on a person’s ability to sleep. Anxiety, depression, anger, or more serious CNS disorders (e.g. Parkinson’s disease) are well known to cause insomnia.

The chakras are inter-related and so imbalance in any one will affect others in the system. Concerns about security related to Muladhara often cause sleeplessness, for example. Frequent insomnia resulting from long-term first chakra stressors may become conditioned, which in turn influences the functioning of the hormonal systems and the brain. Hormonal imbalances and samskaras in the brain impact on health in numerous ways, thus creating other physical or behavioral issues in the chakra system.

### **Healing Program**

The best cure for insomnia is to rebalance the physical and energetic bodies with healthy foods, appropriate exercise, and a positive attitude to life. The goal of “perfect health”, as is described by Deepak Chopra, will encourage individuals to follow such a path towards perfect sleep. Re-

balancing the body and chakra system will ultimately impact on the Vijnanamaya and Anandamaya koshas through improved health, purity, and wisdom gained through personal experience and effort. From this perspective, insomnia provides an opportunity for personal growth and transformation of body, mind, and spirit.

Although numerous approaches can be taken in the treatment of insomnia, this paper will discuss the following:

1. Viyoga / Samyoga model & Yama / Niyama instruction
2. Doshic diet
3. Meditation
4. Asana, pranayama and Yoga Nidra

### **1. Viyoga / Samyoga assessment model**

This model will help individuals to make wise choices and to evaluate the consequences of specific activities relative to their well-being and to their insomnia. For example, considering which category a cup of coffee fits into before drinking it may save someone from a sleepless night.

**Viyoga** – “Separation” – this is the process of separating ourselves from whatever is undesirable in our lives, which helps to purify the body and mind. It involves letting go of unhealthy attachments, giving up self-destructive behaviors, and breaking detrimental relationships.

**Samyoga** – “linking together” – the process of linking to whatever is positive and productive in our lives. It involves the development of mental qualities such as kindness, courage, patience, and compassion. It also involves establishing appropriate priorities, practicing virtues, and cultivating positive relationships. The Yamas and Niyamas provide a philosophical model on which to base these decisions.

**Yamas & Niyamas** The first two limbs of Ashtanga (the Eight Limbs of Yoga) deal with moral precepts (Yamas) and personal observances (Niyamas) that help steer away from suffering and imbalance. The Yamas and Niyamas are inter-related and directly influence each other. Relative to insomnia, they are valuable guidelines on how to regain perfect sleep.

#### **Yamas (moral precepts)**

- Ahimsa (non-violence; compassion)
- Satya (truthfulness)
- Asteya (non-stealing)
- Bramacharya (moderation)
- Aparigrapha (non-attachment)

#### **Niyamas (Personal Observances)**

- Saucha (purity)
- Santosha (contentment)
- Tapas (commitment; discipline)
- Svadhya (spiritual studies)

-Ishvara Pranidhana (devotion to God)

Santosha provides an example of how these precepts can be used to benefit sleep. Instead of lying awake, worrying about not being able to sleep, Santosha teaches us to be content and happy with the situation as it exists in the present moment. Lying in bed, enjoying the textures of the sheets against the skin, breathing in the cool air from the open window, connecting with the breath and consciously relaxing the body are more likely to bring sleep than tossing and turning. A lack of contentment also influences other principals, e.g. Aparagraha. Attachment to eight hours of uninterrupted sleep may cause worry, especially if insomnia is long-term. Emotions such as worry, frustration, anger, exhaustion may stimulate fight-or-flight hormones such as cortisol and adrenocorticotrophic hormone, and over-stimulate the nervous system, all of which impairs rather than improves sleep. Practicing Santosha is Samyoga, linking wise thinking with a positive approach to better sleep.

## **2. Doshic diet**

Diet has a direct and profound impact on sleep. Not only do certain substances impair sleep (e.g. caffeine) but they may aggravate Vata, Pitta, and Kapha doshas. An aggravated Vata dosha is particularly susceptible to insomnia, especially if suffering from a Prana Vata sub-dosha imbalance. Seated in the brain, head, and chest, Prana Vata relates to perception, thinking, and emotions. When imbalanced, Prana Vata is linked to worry, anxiety, an overactive mind, headaches, neurological disorders, and hence insomnia.

It is important to match an individual's prakruti with the correct diet in order to maintain a proper balance of the body's natural doshic energies. Eating and drinking substances that do not suit prakruti create imbalances that accumulate over time (vikruti) and eventually lead to medical concerns. These concerns, which range from mild to life-threatening, include insomnia. As mentioned earlier, insomnia can thus be seen as an indicator and opportunity to re-establish balance through strategies such as diet.

An excellent resource for dosha diets is "Perfect Health" by Deepak Chopra. An individual must first identify their body type as Vata, Pitta, or Kapha (or a combination of these doshas). This book offers a quiz and detailed descriptions of each dosha. From there, an appropriate diet can be chosen (also well described in "Perfect Health"). An on-line dosha quiz can be found at: <http://doshaquiz.chopra.com/>. An on-line resource for doshic diets is: <http://www.naturaltherapyinfo.com/ayurvedic/diet.htm>.

In addition, individuals should try to avoid foods and drinks that are known to cause sleeplessness, even if they are acceptable for their dosha. Chocolate can be a problem for some people, for example, and is best avoided, at least until insomnia has been cured. As well, individuals should discuss any prescription and non-prescription medications they are taking with their medical practitioners to determine if they may be contributing to insomnia and if so, how they can replace or eliminate those products. Adhering to an appropriate doshic diet may also eliminate a person's need to take specific medications, e.g. sleeping drugs or herbal supplements such as melatonin and valerian root. Making dietary and lifestyle changes are usually more effective than sleeping medications in the long term, and it is best to eliminate them

as quickly as possible. To avoid unpleasant side-effects, individuals should consult with medical practitioners regarding the safest method of reducing and/or stopping any medication.

Depending on the individual and their lifestyle, they can make dietary changes gradually or quickly. If someone has a weakened agni and significant buildup of ama, a more gradual release of these toxins may be preferable. Excess ama may cause gas, bloating, elimination difficulties, hyperacidity, and other unpleasant digestive symptoms that may be exacerbated in the short term by a speedy change of diet. People may also feel fatigued and lethargic, have poor appetite and cravings, and possibly experience sleeplessness as their body detoxifies.

A “fiery” Agni is essential for good digestion and health. Agni follows a typical daily cycle that makes us slightly hungry in the morning, very hungry at noon, and moderately hungry in the evening. Between these times agni shuts down the appetite to facilitate efficient digestion. Maintaining this natural rhythm conditions the systems of our bodies to function most effectively, including how we naturally grow tired and ready for a good night’s sleep. If agni’s daily rhythm is disrupted, digestion suffers and symptoms such as heartburn, hyperacidity, stomach “butterflies”, poor appetite, constipation or diarrhea, irritable bowel syndrome, weight loss or gain will occur. Many of these symptoms are also linked to insomnia.

Agni can be stimulated by drinking ginger tea or by eating a small piece of fresh ginger, sprinkled with a few drops of lemon juice and a bit of salt before a full meal. This will activate and enhance the digestive process. Ayurveda also recommends avoiding cold drinks, particularly at meal time. Room temperature drinks mix better with foods and are less likely to extinguish agni. Simply sitting down to eat in a relaxed and mindful manner, focusing on the smell, appearance, taste, and texture of our food will help to stimulate a healthy digestive process. Adhering to a regular eating schedule consistent with Agni’s natural cycle will also help to re-set the digestive fires.

If Agni is too disrupted, it will benefit from being re-fired, a process that will realign it with natural daily rhythms, eliminate discomfort, and hopefully improve sleep. This re-firing program is well described in “Perfect Health” by Deepak Chopra (pg. 295). Most people prefer to do the program over a weekend as it takes three days to reset agni. It is important to be in good health when resetting agni as it may over-tax the body if unwell.

Generally, the program includes eating a healthy breakfast and lunch on day 1, then taking a gentle senna laxative before retiring early. The second day involves a fast which lowers agni. Only liquids are ingested on this day which is intended to reduce the appetite and minimize the number of calories to digest. Resting and relaxing is important on this day. Agni is reset on the third day by eating a light breakfast, a larger lunch and smaller evening meal, which replicates the ideal eating pattern. Drinks include herbal teas, juice, and warm water. Substances to avoid are cold or caffeinated beverages, tobacco, salty or spicy food, or alcohol, as these will unbalance agni again.

After resetting agni, following a doshic diet and eating a light breakfast, substantial lunch, and a light supper are recommended. Whenever possible, eat meals at the same time every day. Once



agni is reset and ama reduced in the body, agni will continue to burn ama on its own, purifying the body as nature intended.

### **3.Meditation**

*Sleep is the best meditation...not for Nirvana, but for survival.*

~The Dalai Lama

*“The activity in your mind is communicated to every cell in your body. When your mind is turbulent, your messenger molecules communicate turbulence to your cells, tissues, and organs. If you can quiet your mind, you can send messages of peace and harmony to every cell in your body. To experience the real essence of yoga – the full integration of body, mind, and spirit – you need to develop the ability to calm your mental turbulence.”*

(“The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success” by D. Chopra; pg. 77-78)

The source of many peoples’ insomnia is a disturbed mind. Focusing on the negative aspects of life, on fears about the future, regrets about the past, interferes with the body’s natural rhythms and its ability to sleep deeply. Yoga and meditation teach mindfulness, the ability to focus our “monkey minds” on the breath, the body, a mantra or affirmation. This practice enhances the mind/body connection, helping settle and refocus the mind on the positive aspects of life so that we feel more balanced, peaceful, and better able to sleep.

According to Dharma Singh Khalasa, M.D. and Cameron Stauth, authors of “Meditation as Medicine”, 75 percent of insomniacs were able to sleep normally after they began a regular meditation practice. They explain that the calming hormones melatonin and serotonin are increased by meditation, while the stress hormone cortisol is decreased. Studies also indicate that 34 percent of people with chronic pain, a common source of sleeplessness, significantly reduced their symptoms and associated medications (some of which are known to disrupt sleep).

There are numerous methods of meditation. Ideally, new meditators will experiment with different styles till they find a method that will encourage them to practice regularly. Four excellent references for learning meditation are:

“Meditation for Beginners” by Jack Kornfield

“8 Minute Meditation” by Victor Davich

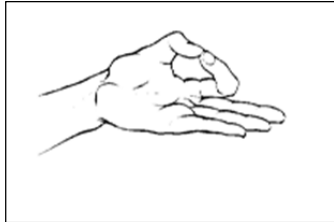
“The Seven Spiritual Laws of Yoga” by Deepak Chopra and David Simon

“Meditation as Medicine” by Dharma Singh Khalasa and Cameron Stauth

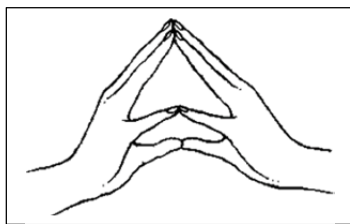
An on-line resource worth exploring is: <http://swamij.com/index-yoga-meditation-meditation.htm>

One suggested meditation for insomnia combines a mudra and a mantra. Once in a comfortable seated position, clients may use one of the following mudras that are suitable for insomnia:

Jnana Mudra (also known as Gyan Mudra)



Hakini Mudra (associated with Ajna)



After taking a few moments to become centered, the mantra “Aham Prema” (ah-hahm preh-mah), which means “I am Divine Love” can provide the meditation focus. Focus on the mantra, allowing it to remain a soft, nearly silent internal whisper. The breath follows its own natural rhythm. When clients notice their thoughts have drifted from the mantra, simply return focus to the words without judgment. Start meditating for 10 minutes once or twice daily and work up to 20 – 30 minute sessions.

An alternate mantra is “Thung”, which helps to sooth Ajna.

A third alternative is the chant “Ong Namō Guru Dev Namō” (I bow before my highest self). Go to <http://www.spiritvoyage.com/mantra/Ong-Namo-Guru-Dev-Namo/MAN-000019.aspx> for an easy to follow version. Ideally, this mantra is sung in one breath but new meditators shouldn’t strain to do so. Taking a second breath after “Ong Namō” or wherever is comfortable is perfectly acceptable.

**4. Asana, Pranayama, and Yoga Nidra** Various types of yoga practices can be beneficial for insomniacs, depending on the source of their problem. People struggling with stress who do not have physical and/or medical conditions would benefit from a combination of traditional hatha sequences that help to relieve tension, and restorative or yoga nidra. Hatha sequences should include calming forward bends and inversions/semi-inversions such as Salamba Sarvangasana and Viparita Karani, as well as pranayama such as Nadi Sodhana and 1:2 diaphragmatic breathing (inhale to a count of 1, exhale to a count of 2, which mimics our natural breath rhythm while asleep). Individuals with physical and/or medical conditions should use restorative, yoga

nidra, and very gentle hatha. Focus should be placed on releasing and relaxing, and on gentle mobility and stretching asana, as well as breath awareness.

According to Yoga Journal, Poses that are contra-indicated for insomnia include:

- Archa Bhekasana (Half Frog Pose)
- Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon Pose)
- Bhardvajasana (a seated twist)
- Eka Pada Rajakapotasana 2 (One-Legged King Pigeon Pose 2)
- Kapotasana (King Pigeon Pose)
- Parvritta Parsvakonasana (Revolved Side Angle Pose)
- Parvritta Trikonasana (Revolved Triangle Pose)
- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
- Utkatasana (Chair Pos)
- Utthita Parsvakonasana (extended Side Angle Pose)
- Ustrasana (Camel Pose)
- Vrksasana (Tree Pose)

Some of the above poses are used commonly in classes (e.g. Tadasana). Clients would be advised to do less strenuous poses (e.g. Tadasana) in a relax manner that does not over-stimulate or build heat in the body. While still experiencing insomnia, it is best to avoid the more strenuous contra-indicated poses.

**Sequence 1 (combining traditional hatha and restorative – ref: “Yoga: Path to Holistic Healing” by BKS Iyengar and “Essential Yoga” by Judy Smith.)**

1. Centering with breath awareness (seated or reclining). Pranayama options include several rounds of Nadi Sodhana, Ujjayi, Brahmari and/or Viloma (interrupted inhalations), 1:2 diaphragmatic breath, all of which are beneficial for insomnia.
2. Uttanasana with blocks to support crown and hands (Calming and recuperative; rests and energized heart and lungs).
3. Prasarita Padottanasana (optional: bolster under crown) (Cools the body and brain; imparts relaxation and calmness.)
4. Adhomuka Svanasana with block under forehead. (Gently stretches entire body; calms and soothes the mind.)
5. Adhomuka Virasana with torso resting on bolsters. (Stretches back and spine; relieves fatigue; soothes eyes and nerves of brain; calming and rejuvenating.)
6. Salamba Paschimottanasana with torso and arms supported. (Relieves back ache; cools the brain; calms the mind; rejuvenating.)
7. Salamba Janu Sirsasana with bolster to support head and arms. (Calms the Sympathetic Nervous System; helps to focus the mind; reduces restlessness.)
8. Setu Bandha Sarvangasana with back on bolsters. (Chin lock calms the flow of thoughts and soothes the mind; encourages a fresh supply of blood to the brain, resting and revitalizing the mind and body; relieves tension in back and spine.)
9. Supta Badha Konasana on heart-bed. (Regulates blood pressure; relieves lower back ache; deeply relaxing)

10. Salamba Sarvangasana with chair. (Relieves stress; alleviates hyper-tension and insomnia.)
11. Viparita Karani. (Restorative and relaxing; alleviates nervous exhaustion; reverses blood flow and relieves tension/swelling in the legs.)
12. Savasana. (Integrates benefits of entire practice.)

Yoga Nidra can be done in place or in addition to Savasana. A good reference for this practice is “Yoga Nidra” by Richard Miller, which also includes a guided CD. Not only does Yoga Nidra deliver us into a deeply relaxed and yet consciously aware state, it helps us to delve empirically into our selves and Selves, helping to alleviate the source of our insomnia. As Richard Miller explains:

During Yoga Nidra, we investigate our actual experience so that we can understand the nature of who we actually are and what the world really is. Yoga Nidra helps us investigate and dispel the roots of our conditioning that underlie our misperceptions of reality. Yoga Nidra dissolves the obstacles that stand in the way of our leading an authentic life of purpose and meaning....” (“Yoga Nidra”, pg. 4-5.)

For more information, Richard Miller discusses Yoga Nidra in a 4 part series that begins with the following link:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViE\\_7f7DbJc&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViE_7f7DbJc&feature=related)

### **Sequence 2 (Combining gentle and restorative poses.)**

1. Seated centering with breath awareness (see sequence 1 for pranayama options).
2. Gentle seated body warm-ups such as seated cat/cow, shoulder rolls, neck crescent stretches, side stretches, and twists. Can be done sitting in a chair.
3. Standing Uttanasana, leaning on the back of a chair. (Stretches the spine and back of legs; soothes the nervous system and quiets the mind.)
4. Adhomukha Svanasana with chair (arms on chair back or seat). (Reduces tightness in the shoulders, back and legs; relieves hypertension and fatigue; calming and soothing.)
5. Standing hip openers with foot on chair. (Creates ease in the hips, groins, and low back; strengthens leg muscles; increases flow of serotonin into bloodstream.)  
*(Stand with 1 foot on chair seat, then forward bend, placing hands on chair seat beside foot.)*
6. Standing Uttanasana with head on chair seat. (Soothes the nervous system and quiets the mind; relieves tension and anxiety.)
7. Seated forward bend on chair. (Soothing; restful; gently stretches entire back and hips, relieving tension; calms the mind.) *(Sit on chair, then forward bend elbows to knees. Rest here a few breaths, then bend hands to floor.)*
8. Adho Mukha Swasticasana with forehead on chair. (Soothes the nervous system and promotes drowsiness. Relieves tension and headaches. Gentle shoulder stretch.) *(Sit cross legged facing the seat of a chair. Fold forward, resting forehead on chair.)*
9. Urdhva Prasarita Padasana with legs on a chair. (Reduces exhaustion; promotes serenity; eases tension in legs; aids digestion.)

10. Adhomukha Bharadvajasana with bolster. (Relieves tension in the muscles of the back, hips, and sides; stretches intercostal muscles, facilitating easy breathing; helps to unwind body and mind; deeply relaxing.) (*Sit in Dandasana with a bolster lying perpendicular to your hips. Bend legs to one side as you twist toward the bolster. Fold forward to rest torso on the bolster.*)
11. Adhomukha Virasana with bolster. (Stretches and tones the spine; relaxes the back and shoulders; calming and nurturing.)
12. Savasana (Promotes deep relaxation and peace) or Yoga Nidra.

Both of these sequences are quite long and clients may choose to do only a few of the poses if time is short. However, the more we commit to practicing relaxation, the more easily and quickly our nervous systems will reward us. It is recommended that individuals with insomnia practice between 30 and 60 minutes daily. Both practices can be done at any time of day, including directly before bed.

In addition to yoga, daily walking and/or swimming are recommended. These activities can be done in a relaxed manner or more vigorously, as suits the individual's needs to reduce tension, mobilize the body, burn calories, and divert the mind.

### **Conclusion**

Yoga is a serious and often misunderstood challenge for individuals, their families, employers, teachers, and communities. The consequences of this condition range from mildly disruptive to serious and potentially life threatening. Those suffering from long-term insomnia may feel helpless and hopeless, especially if they have already tried unsuccessfully to solve their problem. Yet help does exist if they choose to commit to yoga therapy. No guarantees can be made that symptoms will improve immediately. Yoga is not a "quick fix" but rather a gradual, experiential route back to balance and wellness. Like the allopathic medical system, yoga therapy recognizes that insomnia is a multi-faceted problem. Individuals who are willing to examine various aspects of their lives and behaviors, to investigate the tools of yoga, and who are prepared to make the necessary changes will find that peaceful sleep is more than an elusive dream. The yogic path to healing wakens us from the nightmare of insomnia to a reality of holistic well-being and harmony.

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