

SLEEP TIGHT ~ KATE VOGT

After a busy day of multitasking, even the most serene among us can be found wide awake at night, with a mind that won't stop buzzing. According to the National Center for Sleep Disorders Research at the National Institutes of Health, some 30 to 40 percent of adults suffer from symptoms of insomnia within a given year. If you occasionally suffer from sleeplessness, simple strategies can help.

1 SAY GOODNIGHT - Create a bedtime ritual to signal to your body and mind that all activity is done for the day and it's time for rest. Here, the preparations are about reducing the outer stimuli so your body has less work when you sleep. Any food, sensory stimulation, or even thoughts you take in must be digested and absorbed before you will be free to rest. Finish eating two hours prior bedtime, and turn off the TV or put aside your cell phone, iPad, laptop at least a half an hour before retiring. Try to darken the room by removing or covering any lights. If you need an alarm, place it beyond your nighttime reach, facing down or away from you. Before going to bed, imagine there is a basket outside the door of the room where you sleep. Let this basket keep any worries overnight. Also, imagine your sleep space as a timeless and sacred sanctuary free of distractions.

2 STRETCH AND YAWN - Rest on your back and gradually make room for rest to seep in as you contract and stretch your muscles from head to toe. Flex your feet, spread the toes, and then curl them under three times. b. Stretch out one foot and reach the opposite arm overhead. Gently squeeze and release the leg and arm muscles three times. Change sides. c. Hug yourself and shrug the shoulders forward toward one another. Hold for three to four seconds and then release. Change the cross of your arms and repeat. d. Rest the base of your palms above the eyebrows and place your thumbs on your temples. Slide your fingertips along your hairline and circle the thumbs lightly on your temples. e. Yawn three times.

3 SOAK IN LOVE - Either in bed on your yoga mat, come into Child's Pose with your knees wide apart and forehead resting on your hands. Imagine a blanket made of infinite love covering you. Let your head relax onto your hands. Tell your skin, muscles, and organs that they are free from the demands of multi-tasking and being on constant alert. Settle into this cocoon for at least a minute.

4 LET YOURSELF MELT - Lie flat onto your belly, resting your forehead on the backs of your hands. Feel your navel expand toward the surface beneath you as you inhale and pull back as you exhale. With each exhalation, image a deep sigh of 'ah' from your bones, muscles, and organs. Do this for 10 breaths. Without rushing, roll slowly onto your back. Rest your fingers on your belly, feeling it rise and fall as you take 12 more breaths. With each exhalation, let yourself melt into and be absorbed in radiant love. Then, curl into a fetal position on your right side and rest. You may even drift off to sleep.

* If you've had sleep troubles for a month or more, you may have chronic insomnia and may want to contact a health professional for advice.

(for Yoga Journal December 2011)