

Night Time Stretches for Sleep Wellbeing



If you are struggling to shut off at night and great sleep is alluding you or you are waking up unrefreshed and you are not already exercising, it's time to add exercise to your life. You know it's good for you and it's really good for sleep!

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Why? Your body literally needs to be tired in order to sleep really well. Your muscles need to have moved and your lymphatic cleaning system needs to have emptied. All of this happens better when we exercise.

There is a huge amount of evidence connecting exercise to improved sleep.

Being physically active can increase the time you spend asleep and physical body movement has been shown to increase the time spent in deep sleep. Deep sleep is where your body is able to really repair and restore each night.

Exercise not only improves sleep it also boosts mood, relieves anxiety and reduces stress. Your mental health is important and research shows that 30-minutes of moderate exercise five times per week will help you reap the rewards of a happy mind and it will help with insomnia or sleep disorders.

Many people simply can't make more time in their day to exercise but can find 10 minutes at night before bed. The benefits are huge. Not only will your muscles love you for giving them some attention but by combining breathing and gentle exercise you get double benefits of encouraging relaxation - an important part of your wind down routine.

Combine family
and social time
with exercise for
added feel good
hormone activity

Night time stretches to Wind Down

The following is a gentle exercise sequence that you can add to your evening wind-down routine. These stretches are perfect for calming down before bed to promote sleep. They are remarkably effective so give them your attention for 10 minutes each night. Work your way through each exercise 1-10, giving each one approximately 1 minute to stretch and really feel good. Practice some deep slow breathing while you are doing each exercise.



1. Child Pose

Find a space on the floor to do some gentle stretches. Start on your hands and knees. Separate your knees a little bit wider than your hips and draw your toes together. Now lower your hips back towards your heels and rest your forehead on your mat with your hands out in front of you. Walk your fingertips forward so that your arms begin to stretch out in front of you, rest your forearms on the floor. Close your eyes and breathe deeply and calmly for 5 to 10 breaths.



2. Cat/ cow

Move back on to your hands and knees, into a table top position. Line your wrists under your shoulders and your knees under your hips. This is a two part pose to stretch the muscles around your spine. When you inhale, drop your belly towards the floor creating a dip in your back and lift your sit bones and crown of the head towards the ceiling. Then when you exhale, move your back in the opposite direction, rounding your back towards the ceiling and shift your gaze to your navel. Repeat these two movements whilst breathing slowly five times.



3. Downward facing dog

Move from your table top position into downward facing dog. This is a full body stretch and can feel particularly good if you've spent a long time sitting down today. Pedal your feet to stretch your legs out. You can also do any other movements that may feel comfortable for your body. Take 5 deep breaths in this position.



4. Standing, forward fold

From downward facing dog, slowly walk your feet to meet your hands. Let your head and hands hang down in front of your legs. Gently sway your arms from side to side releasing any tension. Take 5 breaths here. Slowly reach for your toes, stretching your arms and the backs of your legs for a gentle release. Then come up to a standing position.



5. Gentle standing spinal twist

Stand with your feet hips width apart, shoulders relaxed and breathe deeply. Then raise your arms out in front of you and gently turn your upper body to the right, slowly twisting your chest and waist to face the right side. Your feet should not move. Then move your gaze and body back to the center, continue to breathe deeply. On your next inhale turn your body to the left, gently twisting your upper body to the left side of the room. Repeat this 3-5 times on each side.



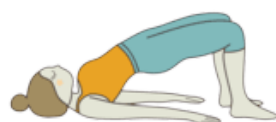
6. Seated forward fold

Make your way to a seated position, with your legs stretched out in front of you. Begin to hinge forward at the hips as you fold over your legs. You can place your hand on your shins, ankles, toes or where ever is comfortable for you. Don't worry about keeping your legs straight or your back flat, just allow your body to release tension. Breathe deeply here 3 times.



7. Seated ankle rotations

Ease yourself back into a seated position, keeping your legs straight out in front of you. Gently point your toes and flex your feet. One foot at a time rotate your ankle in one direction and then the other direction. Continue to inhale and exhale. Once you have finished shake out your legs.



7. Bridge pose

Lay down on to your back. Bend your knees and draw the heels of your feet into your sitting bones. Rest your arms alongside your body. Press your feet and arms into the floor as you begin to lift your tailbone up. Continue lifting until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Hold this pose for up to one minute, all the time focusing on breathing slowly. Release this pose by rolling your spine back down to the floor vertebra by vertebra.



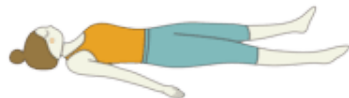
8. Happy Baby Pose

Once you are comfortable laying on your back, bring your knees up to your chest, and open your legs with the soles of your feet pointing upwards. Grasp your feet and begin to roll and rock your legs from side to side. This will gently massage your back muscles.



9. Legs up the wall or Legs up

Let go of your feet and straighten your legs. Your hips should be at a 90 degree angle. Many people like to do this version against a wall, so they can rest their legs. Otherwise, holding your feet to the ceiling, stacking your ankles over hips. Notice how the blood rushes from your feet to your upper body. This posture is excellent for circulation and to help to settle the mind before bed.



10. Final Relaxation

This is your final exercise. Lay your body flat on your back in a comfortable position. Allow your mind to become calm and still as you focus on inhaling and exhaling. When you feel your body and mind begin to drift off, it's time to make your way to bed ready for a restful sleep.

Gentle
exercising
before bed feels
great and helps
us to wind down