

3 Relaxation Exercises for Better Sleep



Looking to improve your sleep quality or fall asleep faster? Mindfulness and meditation can be great techniques for getting both your mind and body in a relaxed state and ready to sleep. **The wellness experts at Johns Hopkins HealthCare Solutions share three simple practices you can try before bed.**

1 Yoga Stretches

While many people consider yoga exercise, it's also a great way to calm the mind and relax your muscles, making it the perfect nighttime routine to help you wind down. Here are a few simple poses you can try:

Hip/Spine Stretch

Sitting with your legs crossed, place your palms on the ground in front of you and slowly bend forward, letting your neck relax and your head hang down toward the ground. You won't have to stretch very far to feel the benefits! If this feels uncomfortable, sitting on a pillow can help. You should feel a stretch in your hips/pelvis and along your spine. Spend a few moments to take some deep breaths while in this pose.



Legs/Spine Stretch

Standing with your feet about six inches apart, slowly fold downward and reach for your toes. Don't feel like you need to touch the ground—the goal is a gentle stretch in your legs and spine, so bend your knees as much as you need to. You can grab your elbows and twist slowly from side to side to get more of a stretch in your spine, too. Deep breaths will help your whole body relax into the stretch.



Spine Twist

Lying on your back, bring your right knee into your chest and then let it slowly fall across your other leg so that your knee is pointing toward the ground. For a deeper twist, you can take your right arm out to the side and turn your gaze toward that arm. Pausing to take a few deep breaths will help relax your entire spine. Then repeat on the other side.



2 Mindfulness Practice

It sounds simple, but just a few minutes of focusing on your body can help both your mind and body relax. Here are two easy techniques to try:

Creating Awareness

Sit upright in a comfortable position and close your eyes. Try to identify the sounds, smells and physical sensations you are experiencing in the moment. Then notice your breath—is it shallow or deep, fast or slow? What part of your body moves when you breathe? Listen to the sound of your inhales and exhales. This exercise can help you quiet the mind and focus on the present.



Maintaining Stillness

Once you're comfortable with the awareness exercise, take it a step further by noticing the point at which your inhale turns into an exhale and vice versa. Just by noticing, your breath will become smoother and more even, making you even more relaxed.



3 Breathing Exercise

A fun way to add more deep breathing to your day is to try an exercise called "Sleep Bubbles." All you have to do is purse your lips and exhale, as if you were blowing a bunch of bubbles out of your mouth. Make sure you take a deep inhale and then try to blow bubbles slowly and evenly until you are out of breath. It can be helpful to have a physical sensation and a sound to focus on if you have trouble just listening to your breath. This exercise is a great way to teach children relaxation techniques, too!

