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Ease into Sleep

WITH MINDFULNESS



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A 6-Minute Mindfulness Practice to Relax and Retune After a Hectic Day

On autopilot, we might not notice all the stress we carry around — Explore this brief mindfulness practice to unwind your body and mind.

By **Elisha Goldstein**

In order to deeply relax and be present in life, it's important to understand how we hold our bodies and where your body falls into stress.

It may be that your body tenses up as soon as the alarm goes off in the morning, or maybe it's the morning commute, or it could be when you interact with specific people, or when you're going to bed thinking about all the things that need to get done tomorrow.

Mind bracing can be identified by a flurry of thoughts that are racing through your mind. Body bracing might feel like muscle contraction, like a tightening in the chest, shoulders, or jaw. Your intention here is to simply get curious about what it feels like when your mind or body braces.

It may be helpful to jot down a list of when you noticed these reactions during your day.

What precipitated these events?

Where do you feel them most in your body?

Practice noticing when and where you brace and then work on actively releasing the tension.

You can do this releasing through a deep breath in and out or by gently stretching in a way that helps the body and mind release. Or try a Relax and Retune Meditation Practice to slow down and release tension.

RELAX AND RETUNE MEDITATION PRACTICE



1. You can do this practice either seated or lying down, with your eyes either open or closed. Starting off with a couple deep breaths, in through the nose, out through the mouth, just a sense of releasing the moment we came from to this moment right now.

Allowing your awareness to descend fully into the body, allowing your body to completely soften, relaxing any muscles in your face, your eyes, your forehead, your cheeks.

2. Then notice how your body is naturally breathing, not needing to exert any effort at all. If you can learn how to breath, you can learn how to relax. Breathe in, and have the awareness that you're breathing in. Breathing out and just relaxing, releasing any tension, any holding in the body. Breathing in, with this sense of knowing that you're breathing in. Breathing out, releasing any busyness of mind, any clutter in the mind, and just letting be.
3. Continuing with this practice for a few moments, just an awareness of the breath coming in and the sense of releasing, relaxing the body. If at any point during this practice the mind wanders, the first step is just to notice the wandering, and then soften the body.
4. As you're settling in to being here, just allow your awareness to fill the body completely. Settle into the whole body, a sense of being here, relaxed yet awake.
5. As you come to the end of the practice, just notice how you're feeling now. How your body is feeling, how you're feeling emotionally, and just take a moment to acknowledge yourself for creating this space to engage in this, for your own health and well-being.
6. Bring your awareness now to your face, gently allowing the light to seep through, and open your eyes if they are closed.

You'll be imperfect at this, don't worry. Like learning to ride a bike or play an instrument, the more you learn where you brace and the more you practice releasing, the better and better you'll get at it.

The key is continuity.

Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D. is hosting an online course to help people fully integrate mindfulness into their lives in a deep way in order to realize more enduring change. The in-depth 6-month online

course called [A Course in Mindful Living](#) runs this September. Sign up now to join a community of people growing in confidence, calm, compassion and a life you love.



ELISHA GOLDSTEIN

Elisha Goldstein, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and conducts a private practice in West Los Angeles. He is creator of the 6-month online program [A Course in Mindful Living](#), author of *Uncovering Happiness: Overcoming Depression with Mindfulness and Self-Compassion* (Atria Books, 2015), *The Now Effect* (Atria Books, 2012), *Mindfulness Meditations for the Anxious Traveler* (Atria Books, 2013), and co-author of *A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook* (New Harbinger, 2010).



A Body Scan Meditation to Help You Sleep

Explore this guided meditation to calm your body, bring mindful curiosity and openness to the present moment, and improve your quality of sleep.

By **Diana Winston**

A good night's sleep has a significant impact on our health—helping us feel more energized, less stressed, and able to perform better mentally. Unfortunately, many people struggle to get a full night's sleep, with only 47 percent of Americans reporting they feel well-rested during the work week.

If you're the kind of person who finds themselves wide awake at 3 a.m. contemplating the shadows on their ceiling, practicing mindfulness may offer the secret to sleeping better. A randomized clinical trial from UCLA found that mindfulness meditation improves sleep quality among older adults with sleep disturbances. The following guided meditation was used in that study to help people fall asleep. May it do the same for you.



A Body Scan Meditation for Better Sleep

13:50

This is a guided body scan meditation to help you prepare for sleep as you do the meditation. You may find yourself drifting off to sleep. This is fine, so you can allow the meditation to turn off on its own. If you notice thoughts such as worries or concerns arising that take your attention away from the meditation, this is also normal. See if you can redirect your attention back to the body scan, gently letting go of these thoughts.

If it's possible, we'll be noticing our body lying down on the bed. We'll be feeling the body's sensations that are present, scanning the body for any kinds of obvious sensations like vibrations, tingling sensations, heaviness, pressure, movement, heat, coolness. We'll be noticing these sensations without trying to change them or make them different, simply bringing a mindful attention of curiosity and openness to the present moment.

If you notice yourself starting to think about the sensation or think about something else, see if you can simply come back to the feelings and sensations present in your body.

1. We can begin the meditation by noticing the sensations at the top of our head. So simply bring your attention to the top of your head and notice what you feel. You might notice some vibration or pressure. And then allow your attention to notice your skull as it makes contact with the bed or the pillow.
2. There might be a sense of pressure. Wait. We might notice some other sensation. Simply be curious about these sensations, feeling them.
3. Sometimes when you encounter a sensation, there may be some tension. If you can, allow it to gently relax. If that doesn't seem possible, simply notice what it is that you feel and notice your face area, your forehead, eyes, nose.

4. Notice your cheeks and mouth. There may be sensations of tingling, temperature, tightness; let it all be there. Be curious about your experience, and begin to notice the sensations in your throat.
5. Now become aware of anything that's present for you in your shoulder area. Within any point you notice tension arising. Sometimes in the act of noticing it, you may find yourself releasing the tension and relaxing. If it feels extremely tense, you can breathe gently, directing the breathing into that area to allow it to soften. And if it still stays tense, just continue on with the body scan.
6. At this moment you're aware of the sensations in your left shoulder. Bring your attention there, and then let your attention go down your arm. Notice any vibration, tingling coolness, pressure, movement. As you reach your elbow, your lower arm. And then your hand. There are often quite a few sensations in your hand area.
7. Notice your hands and fingers. Be curious and open to the sensations that are present. Also allowing your hands to soften and relax, now bring your attention up to your right shoulder again, noticing any sensations that might be present. And then start to go down your right arm. Hand, vibration, tingling, movement. Noticing your elbow. Your forearm. And then also your hands. And fingers.
8. Again, lots of sensations are usually present in our hands and fingers. But if at any point there's no sensation, just notice the absence of sensation. Let your attention go back to the top of your shoulders to your back. Notice the shoulder area and bring your attention down your back.
9. You can zigzag it across your back, or make an up-and-down movement in your mind. Sometimes there is strong sensation in our back. The sensation of touching the bed pressure weight.

Sometimes there's not much sensation at all. Can you be open and curious to whatever the experience is. Kind to yourself no matter what.

10. You can notice your upper back. Your mid back. And notice the sensations in your lower back swell making sure to breathe. If thoughts crop up as you're doing this, worries, concerns, once again, see if you can let them go. Let them be like clouds floating in the sky. Moving across your mind. But don't take them so personally, just let them go if possible. Or at the very least come back to my words, and this body scan. And bring your attention to the top of her chest area.
11. Gently scan your chest down to the upper rib cage, into the stomach area. See if you can soften your stomach. Breathe more deeply directing some breath into that area allowing it to soften and relax.
12. You can notice your pelvis the whole pelvic area. The places where your body connects with the bed. Feeling whatever sensations are present. Now gently bring your attention to your left hip. I will start to bring the awareness down our leg. Noticing the sensations in our thigh. You can circle your attention gently around the leg.
13. Noticing whatever it's obvious to you. Not forgetting to breathe. Bringing this kind and curious attention to your leg. And then to your knee and left calf noticing whatever is present vibration tingling he. Itching warmth. Coolness. Heaviness. Let it be hair whatever it is. Noticing your ankle. Foot and toes.
14. Maybe quite a bit of sensation in your feet possibly maybe not become aware of ever is here for you. and come back up to your right hip notice the sensations in your right hip. And again bring your attention down your right thigh. Healing whatever is present.
15. You can circle your attention Or notice it in any other way that makes sense to you. Feeling the vibration and tingling. Heat

heaviness movement into your knee. And down to your leg your calf feeling the sensations present scanning your body and then down to your right ankle and toes.

16. Now that you've scanned your body. You're welcome to start again. You can continue listening, Or you can continue on your own. This time if you wish you can start at your feet. And go back up through your body till you get to the top of your head. Feel free to scan your body up and down as many times as it's helpful to you.



DIANA WINSTON

Diana Winston is the Director of Mindfulness Education at UCLA's Mindful Awareness Research Center and author of several books including the forthcoming *The Little Book of Being: Practices and Guidance for Uncovering your Natural Awareness*.



Mindful Movement to Ease into Sleep

A 3-minute bedtime practice from Cara Bradley that stretches and relaxes areas of your body that tighten up during the day, followed by a meditation to settle the mind. **By Cara Bradley**

If you're one of the 80 million Americans having a hard time falling asleep, count yourself among the ranks of those more likely to suffer from diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity, and depression (As if being tired all the time wasn't bad enough).

Recently there have been some studies looking into whether or not mindfulness, and other meditative movements like those found in yoga, tai chi, and qi gong, can improve sleep quality. According to one [review of studies](#) taking a few minutes to settle your mind and body before bed can help you fall asleep faster as well as help you [get more restful sleep](#).

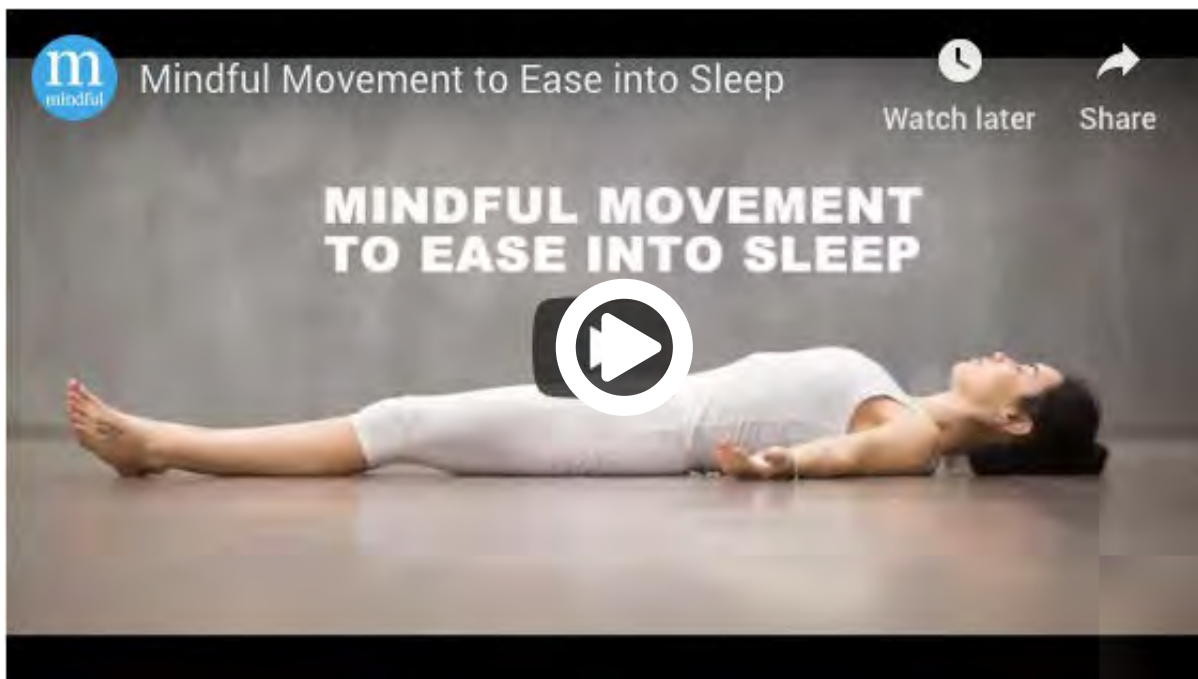
There's still a need for [more high-quality research](#). One review of 1,049 studies on meditative movement and sleep outcomes only found 14 studies worthy of being included in the review. Of those 14, the results showed that mindful movement interventions resulted in significantly better sleep quality.

While we wait for the research community to provide more definitive answers, it seems it's definitely worth giving mindful movement a try if you have trouble sleeping.

In part three of our mindful movement series with Cara Bradley you can try a bedtime routine that stretches and relaxes areas of your body that tighten up during the day, such as low back, hip flexors, and upper back muscles, followed by a meditation to settle the mind.

Before you begin, get yourself ready for bed (because you'll be sawing logs before you can say *good night*.)

MINDFUL MOVEMENT TO EASE INTO SLEEP



1) Cat/Cow

This movement stretches your upper back and loosens tension down your spine. Place your hands on the ground beneath your shoulders and your knees on the ground beneath your hips, keep your back straight and your head forward. As you inhale gently drop your belly towards the floor, lift your chest and look forward arching your spine

slightly. As you exhale bring your face towards your navel while doming your upper spine, rounding the top of your back. *Repeat for 3-5 breaths.*

2) Deep Lunge

From an all fours position, step your right foot forwards and slide your left knee further behind you. Place your hands on your knee. This deep lunge stretches the front of your hips, an area that gets tight after a day of sitting. Keep your hands on the floor or place on your front knee. *Hold for 5 breaths. Switch sides.*

3) Seated Neck Stretch

Have a seat and cross your legs if you can. Bring your right hand over your head and place it on your left ear. Gently drop your right ear towards your shoulder. *Hold for 5 breaths. Bring your head back to center gently, switch sides, going easy on your neck with you switch.*

4) Dynamic Bridge

Place your arms flat on the ground by your sides a few inches away from your body, with your palms facing down. Place both feet to the floor under your bent knees. Make sure your back is flat and your body feels centered and balanced. Then, as you inhale lift your hips up towards the ceiling, creating a straight line from your knees, down your thighs, to your chest. Interlock your fingers under your body and shimmy your shoulder blades towards each other to open your chest muscles. *Hold for 8 deep breaths.*

5) Knee to Chest into Twist

Stretch out your legs and slide them together. Pull your right knee into your chest clasping your fingers around your right shin and gently hug your knee in to stretch your low back and hips. *Hold for 3 breaths.* Release your knee and send it towards the left for a gentle spinal twist. Turn your gaze to the right. *Hold for 3 breaths and switch sides.*

MINDFUL BREATHING TO EASE INTO SLEEP

For this meditation you'll extend your exhale twice as long as your inhale as a way to settle your mind and nervous system before getting under the covers.

Let go of your day. Now that your body is more relaxed, stretch yourself out long on the floor. Separate your feet and position your hands with your palms facing upwards.

Notice your breath. Don't change your breathing yet; just notice the subtle lifting and lowering around your belly as you breathe.

Extend Your Breath. Breathe so that your exhale is twice as long as your inhale. For example you could count to three on your inhale and six during your exhale. (If that feels uncomfortable, you can change it by counting 2 on your inhale and 4 on your exhale, etc.) The point isn't to hyperventilate or pass out. You want the ratio to feel comfortable, so that you'll stay with it. The counting will help you stay focused and relax your body at the same time.

1. Breathe in slowly while counting to two.
2. Pause for a count of one.
3. Breathe out slowly while counting to four.
4. Pause for a count of one.
5. Once again, "Inhale, one, two, pause; exhale, one, two, three, four, pause."
6. Continue to breathe this way. At some point it will feel natural to let the counting go and to allow your mind to rest in the direct experience of breathing.
7. Eventually let go and just breathe however feels normal to you.

After a few minutes open your eyes and notice how you feel. Slowly get up and crawl right into bed. Good night!



CARA BRADLEY

Cara Bradley, a best-selling author of *On The Verge: Wake Up, Show Up, and Shine*, is a former pro skater for Rollerblade and the founder of Verge Body-Mind Center in Philadelphia. As a speaker and body-mind expert, Cara teaches executives and athletes how to live in flow using strategies integrating movement, breath, and mindfulness training to optimize wellbeing and performance. She works with organizations including Coca-Cola, World Bank Group, SAP and Goldman Sachs and college sports teams including the 2018 National Champion Villanova Men's Basketball team. Cara hosts a weekly podcast on body-mind training and is a frequent contributor to Happify, Whil, Mindful, Oprah.com, and Thrive Global.



A Meditation for Easing Into Sleep

The more you try to force sleep, the less likely you are to achieve it. Explore this guided meditation to let go of stubborn thoughts and get a full night's rest. **By Mark Bertin**

Since staying awake while we're meditating is often a big challenge, it's no surprise that mindfulness has been shown to promote healthy sleep. It's not all that exciting to sit quietly and breathe. It can be downright calming. But that's not the whole story. Mindfulness practice encourages nonjudgmental awareness—seeing things exactly as they are, with openness and curiosity. If we accept the basic facts outlined above about what tends to lead to healthy sleep, and it contradicts how we live, it might be time to patiently explore what stands between us and change. With sleep, as with meditation practice, intentions are easier said than done. Here's a little reflection and inventory list that may help.

Neither sleep routines nor mindfulness practice responds well to a heavy hand. If you set out to force yourself into sleep, you're less likely to sleep. If you strain for some picture-perfect mindset when meditating, you'll create more stress and uncertainty. If you

set yourself up with clear-sighted planning and patient resolve—intentionally but unforced—sleep and mindfulness are both more to likely follow.

A GUIDED MEDITATION FOR EASING INTO SLEEP

In considering any meditation related to sleep, recognize that there's nothing to force, and nothing to make happen. Since striving makes sleep more challenging, set out to practice without specific expectations or goals. We cannot make ourselves sleep, but perhaps, by aiming to stay settled and getting less caught up in our thoughts, we fall asleep anyway.

For the meditation that follows, there will be no ending bell or instruction. At the end, continue to practice if you like, or hopefully enjoy a good night's rest instead.

1. Start while lying down, allowing your legs to rest in a comfortable posture, hip-width apart. You can place your arms by your side or your hands on your belly.
2. Begin by noticing your breath. Pay attention, as best as you're able to the physical movement related to breathing, such as your belly rising and falling. Or, if you prefer, focus your attention more closely on the air moving in and out of your nose and mouth.
3. It's normal, expected even, to have thoughts — lots of them. Your mind rehashes the day or gets caught up in worrying about tomorrow. Recognize those habits, and then practice letting them be. Label whatever grabs your attention, and come back again to noticing the breath. Breathing in... and breathing out.

4. Notice if you get caught up in effort, or frustration, or fear, with compassion for yourself. Catch thoughts of self-criticism or frustration, and come back to just one breath, one more time. Thoughts are only thoughts. Breathing in... breathing out. There's nothing you need to fix or change right now in this moment. Notice where your thoughts go, and label them "thoughts." Come back to one next breath, over, and over again.
5. Shift attention to sensations in your body. Start by moving your awareness to physical sensations in your feet. You don't need to wiggle your toes or move your feet, just notice them — the temperature or the pressure of your heel against the blanket or the mat beneath you.
6. From your feet, move your attention into your lower legs, noticing whatever there is to see. Letting go of a sense of effort or needing to make anything happen. And then from your lower legs, through your knees, and into your upper legs. If you feel any sense of stress or tension, aim to relax and let go.
7. Then through your buttocks and pelvis, and into your belly and abdomen. You might notice a sense of your breath moving up and down, or other physical sensations, or sometimes even reflection of emotion (perhaps an emotion like fear or anger reflects in the stomach in the form of tension or tightness). And as you move from your belly and now into your chest, note each time your mind gets caught up in thoughts of discomfort or distraction. And then gently and with patience, guiding it back one more time.
8. Move around into your back, certainly a place many of us hold tension in different ways, relaxing your muscles as best as you're able, lowering your shoulders from your ears. If you feel a need to make an adjustment, allow that to happen with intention, pausing and choosing your next action. Shift your attention into your hands and lower arms, again without actively needing to move or change anything, observing and letting go.

9. Then moving through your neck and into the muscles of your face, perhaps noticing any locations of tightness or pinching, and then with gentleness, as best as you're able, relaxing those muscles. And then for a few moments, have a general awareness of physical sensations throughout your body.
10. And now, if you're still awake, bring your attention back to the breath, each time the mind wanders into the past or into the future, or wherever it chooses to go. If it's a useful anchor for your attention, you can count breaths, breathing in, one, breathing out, one, breathing in, two, breathing out, two... When you reach ten, start at one again.
11. If counting becomes a distraction, then just stay with the sensation of breathing — wherever you feel the breath entering or leaving your body, or the rising or falling of your belly and chest. Continue on your own now, counting breaths up to ten, patiently returning your attention whenever you become distracted. If you lose track of counting, that's fine. Start over wherever you last remember.

**MARK BERTIN**

Dr. Mark Bertin is a developmental behavioral pediatrician and author of *Mindful Parenting for ADHD*, *The Family ADHD Solution* and *How Children Thrive: The Practical Science of Raising Independent, Resilient, and Happy Kids*. He is an assistant professor of pediatrics at New York Medical College, on the faculty of the Windward Teacher Training Institute, and on the editorial advisory board of Common Sense Media.