

**In spite of [all the yoga](#) and [all the benefits that it brings](#) we succumb to insomnia from time to time.**

Following these suggestions works sometimes, and other times it does not in which case, just jump to point 10. Nevertheless, it is useful to know all the previous 9 steps:

### **1.-Eating early and light**



Taking the last meal of the day before 7 PM

helps not only from the point of view of yoga, especially for those of us who practice asana (poses) early the next morning, but also for good rest.

If the body is trying to digest a heavy meal it will be difficult for it to fall asleep. Besides, when we eat early we give the digestive system an opportunity to wind down and get into rest mode, which in is also a good signal for the psychic, one that says: “ I am ready to fast, rest, and sleep”.

### **2.-Smells**

I am very sensitive to smells and do not like to have much of a scent anywhere. However, I have found that after an early dinner, when the dishes are in the washer and the buzz of the day is quieting down, it is good to burn one up. The benefit of it happening in the kitchen is that only a subtle scent reaches the other rooms, and the light fragrance sends a soft signal that dinner is over and the ritual of bed-time is beginning. I would not recommend strong fragrances for the bedroom because they can interfere.

Smell is a very strong way to send signals to the mind and when used wisely it can mark the end of a portion of the day and the start of another, in this case, the beginning of the ritual of sleep.

### **3.-The bedroom is for sleep, even if it isn't**

If you work from your bedroom the energy of the room will make it harder to sleep in it, and so it is always a good idea to do business in a separate area. This may not always be possible of course, depending on the amount of room one has, life situation, etc. But even if you only have one and you work from home, I would suggest putting a curtain or a partition that separates the space where you work from the space where you sleep.

Just as an example I practice yoga-asana in my bedroom, but before I do I make up the bed (to signal the end of sleep) and put one of those three parts foldable Japanese screens ([US\\$ 40 at amazon](#)) to delimit where the bedroom ends and where the “yoga studio” starts.

Of course it is all in perception as it’s still the same bedroom, but in my mind this creates a compartment which signals when I do yoga and when I go to sleep. It works.

## 4.-Ritual

Most of the time, good sleep comes when there is a ritual around it, so if you take big decorative pillows out of the bed, shower or take a bath, change the light, lower the curtains, put your clothes away in a closet, brush your teeth and then get in bed, these are them! Your own rituals. Do not skip them;

If you do not yet have them, perhaps you may want to consider creating a few.

## 5.-Cleaniness

The bedroom must feel cozy and needs to have clean sheets, nice pillows, and soft covers. I consider bedding an investment in good sleeping, good rest, and hence better living. I make it a ritual to change the sheets of the bed every other week, sometimes every week, and to make sure that the pillows are comfy (i.e.: how old is your pillow?).

Also body hygiene is important, take a warm bath or shower, let the body know that it is being prepared for rest. It might not work on day one but if this becomes something you do regularly then the body will respond and deploy the right chemicals, it will cooperate with the ritual.

Remember, we are all children that just happen to have grown up in size, but all the techniques we use with children (discipline, bed time stories (read “rituals” for adults) work with us too.

## 6.-Early disconnect

one hour before bed it is important to shut down all screens, computers, and video games. If this is too difficult (I know for me it is) then maybe a recommendation could be to watch something light and funny, i.e.: there are three whole seasons of “*Arrested Development*” (a very funny show) that can be streamed from [Hulu](#) (\$8 per month membership) or something like that, which will keep the mind in a light state. There is also “*30 Rock*”, which you can stream for free. These are shows that are funny and very light. It is important to never watch news before bed, that will definitely make sleep more difficult.

## 7.-Sleepy Time tea and herbal supplements

one could go with the rituals above but I have made it a separate point because of the amazing quality of it.

This tea (from Celestial Seasons) is one of those incredible effective discoveries you come across from time to time. They also have a vanilla flavor. When I am too excited I usually put two tea bags. You can find it pretty much in any supermarket these days.

Those supplements for sleeping that you can find in the Whole Foods work well as well (i.e.: [Deep Sleep](#), very effective, or [Knock Out](#), which is even more powerful). Of course it is always wise to talk to a doctor before trying new supplements.

## 8.-Tratak yoga practice

The yogic technique of Tratak is simple and helpful. You light up a



candle and put it at eye sight level (i.e.: sit on the floor and put the candle on a bed side table, use a cushion if you need to raise higher so that your eyes are leveled with the flame).

Then you turn off the lights so you only get the light from the candle and stare into it with eyes open and without blinking until your eyes fill with moist. Then you close your eyes, say a prayer (optional) and blow the candle. Then go to sleep.

Many people who try this for the first time do not get their eyes wet and that is OK, it will come with practice.

Tratak is said to clear the optical nerves and to induce lucid dreaming.

## 9.-Meditation

I remember my father once telling me that if he could not sleep he would say to his mind “You don’t want to sleep, good, we will study law books then”. He was going to school in his late 40s and mentioned that nothing worked better to put him back to sleep.

I do a different version; if I cannot sleep I grab the cushion and sit in meditation (I use [this technique](#)). I have tried meditating right there in bed but find it does not work because the mind gets restless very quickly, so sitting is the way to do it and, especially if it is late at night, it does not take long for the sleep waves to come back. The mind will do anything, even sleep, to avoid watching itself in silence!

## 10.- When nothing else works, surrender

Let’s keep it real, sometimes nothing works. In cases like this I leave the bedroom, make myself some more Sleepy Time tea, maybe with two teabags, get a “knock out” herbal supplement and read a book, a boring book. As much as possible I try to watch the stream of endless thoughts that seem to fight for attention, and not react.

What are some of the yoga inspired solutions you have found?

**Simply put, if the sun has gone to bed, we should soon follow suit.**

These days it's old advice; outdated, no longer applicable to the modern world. Generations X, Y and Z have every temptation to stay up late and little motivation to wake up early.

Before the prevalence of electricity, "early to bed, early to rise" was probably an easier proverb to follow. When the sun retired and all was dark there wasn't a whole lot to do besides sleep. I imagine there was little temptation to stay up late—no TV, no internet, no late night bars, and simply no light. Dawn must have been a welcome occurrence as it meant the time for activity.

Now we have every excuse to stay up late—the dark is no obstacle. And staying up late leads to sleeping in. I know very few people who happily welcome dawn. Besides my baby boomer parents and a few of their peers, most find waking up before 7:00 a.m. or even 8:00 a.m. to be simply absurd.

But this schedule is *way* out of sync with nature. Simply put, if the sun has gone to bed, we should soon follow suit. And when the sun arises, as should we.

Most of nature is on this timetable. Take birds, for instance. They're never heard chirping at night as they've settled down to rest. And as soon as dawn strikes they're again awake and lively. That's the [sleep](#) schedule nature intended—not only for birds, but for humans as well.

Ayurveda has been saying "early to bed, early to rise" for thousands of years, and the advice will forever remain applicable.

### **There's a reason why keeping in sync with nature's rhythms makes your body happy and healthy.**

Even the most basic understanding of the Ayurvedic *doshas*, given here, can explain why going to bed early and waking up early make so much sense.

We, and everything around us, are made up of the five elements: air, space, fire, water, and earth. These elements combine to form the three doshas: *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. They are biological energies that influence our bodies and minds, each having its own particular qualities and traits.

The Vata dosha is a combination of air and space. *Vata's qualities are light, mobile, dry, cold, erratic and subtle.*

The Pitta dosha is comprised of fire and water. *Pitta's qualities are hot, sharp, light and intense.*

The Kapha dosha is comprised of earth and water. *Kapha is heavy, dull, stable, soft and static.*

The doshas exist not only within our bodies but also outside of us, influencing the day's energy. Each dosha is dominant twice a day, as follows:

- 2:00 a.m. – 6:00 a.m.: Vata dominance
- 6:00 a.m. – 10 a.m.: Kapha dominance
- 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.: Pitta dominance
- 2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.: Vata dominance
- 6:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.: Kapha dominance
- 10:00 p.m. – 2:00 a.m.: Pitta dominance

These times of dominance affect the way we feel by increasing their respective energy within us. For this reason, our bodies experience harmony when we carry out a daily routine that balances the doshas' influences.

Hence, Ayurveda recommends [going to sleep](#) by or around 10:00 p.m.—during Kapha time. Kapha is slow, stable and dull. It also has that same kind of influence on our bodies and minds, which is ideal for falling asleep.

After 10 pm we enter the Pitta time of day. Pitta's qualities are hot, sharp, light and intense. None of these traits are conducive to falling asleep. This explains why you get a second wind if you're up at 11:00 p.m. or Midnight and feel ready and motivated to do anything but sleep; Pitta is in full effect.

Therefore, it's best to go to bed by 10:00 p.m.— 10:30 or 11:00 p.m. at the latest. This makes it much easier to fall asleep than a later bedtime.

Because Ayurveda recommends that everyone (with a few exceptions) wakes up early, we also need that early bedtime to ensure we get enough sleep. Ayurveda advises arising during *brahmamuhurta*—the two hours before sunrise. This is the best time for yoga and meditation—which are important practices in Ayurveda for maintaining health of the body and mind.

### **In these hours, the atmosphere is calm and quiet and the mind is relatively clear.**

Not everyone may be so inclined for a 4:00 a.m. wake-up call, but at least try to be up by 6:00 a.m. The idea is to awake during Vata time. Vata's light and mobile influence on the early morning hours make it easier to wake up and easier to empty the bowels.

After 6:00 a.m. we enter the Kapha time of day. Again that slow, dull, stable energy bears its effects. When you wake up at 8:00 a.m. or 9:00 a.m. you'll likely feel groggy and sluggish because of Kapha's influence. Even if you got a good eight hours of sleep, arising during Kapha hours means you still won't feel fresh and well rested.

### [Also important is the quantity of sleep we get.](#)

Sleep is considered in Ayurveda to be one of the three pillars of life along with food and sex. Not everyone needs the same amount of sleep, but we all need enough. It gives the body, mind and senses a chance to refresh and rejuvenate.

Depending on the individual's constitution, Ayurveda recommends between six and eight hours of sleep a night.

Vata types need the most sleep, and Kapha types the least. To ensure that your six to eight hours are of good quality sleep, always try to go bed by 10:00 p.m. and wake up by 6:00 a.m.

Just like everything else in life, too much of a good thing can have negative effects; sleep included. Excessive sleep brings about as much imbalance as lack of sleep and causes causes lethargy, dullness, and heaviness. More than eight hours is only recommended for those who are ill, pregnant or elderly.

As for naps, they're generally not recommended except in the summer, and for the ill, pregnant and elderly. Keep your naps to 20 minutes max.

In summary, try to follow these three principles for more quality and restful sleep:

1. Go to bed by 10:00 p.m., wake up by 6:00 a.m.
2. Get between six and eight hours of sleep a night
3. Avoid daytime napping

**This rhythm keeps the body in sync with nature, and being in sync with nature is the ultimate definition of health.**