

Role of Yoga Nidra in Alleviating Insomnia and Enhancing Sleep Quality

Kaelan Vireth*

Department of Neurology, Nakamura Gakuen University, Fukuoka, Japan

DESCRIPTION

Sleep is a vital component of overall health, influencing physical, mental, and emotional well-being. However, insomnia and other sleep disorders affect millions globally, leading to daytime fatigue, impaired cognitive function, mood disturbances, and reduced quality of life. Conventional treatments such as medications and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) are effective but may have limitations including side effects, cost, and accessibility. In this context, complementary and alternative therapies have gained interest, among which Yoga Nidra—a guided meditative practice often referred to as “yogic sleep”—has emerged as a promising non-pharmacological intervention for improving sleep quality and managing insomnia [1].

Yoga Nidra is a form of deep relaxation and guided meditation that systematically takes practitioners through stages of body awareness, breath control, visualization, and mindfulness, all while maintaining conscious awareness. Unlike traditional yoga that emphasizes physical postures, Yoga Nidra primarily focuses on mental relaxation and conscious rest, facilitating profound physiological and psychological calm. This unique state between wakefulness and sleep is thought to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, promoting relaxation, reducing stress, and enhancing the body's natural ability to fall asleep and maintain restorative sleep cycles [2].

Clinical and empirical evidence supports the role of Yoga Nidra in alleviating symptoms of insomnia and improving overall sleep quality. Several randomized controlled trials have demonstrated that regular practice of Yoga Nidra can significantly decrease sleep latency (time taken to fall asleep), reduce nocturnal awakenings, and increase total sleep duration. Participants often report feeling more rested, less anxious, and better able to cope with daily stressors after incorporating Yoga Nidra into their routine. These benefits are particularly relevant given that insomnia frequently coexists with anxiety, depression, and chronic pain-conditions that Yoga Nidra has also been shown to positively influence [3].

Physiologically, Yoga Nidra is believed to modulate the autonomic nervous system by increasing parasympathetic activity

while downregulating the sympathetic “fight or flight” response. This shift facilitates a decrease in heart rate, blood pressure, and cortisol levels—biological markers closely associated with stress and hyperarousal, which are common underlying factors in insomnia. Functional neuroimaging studies further suggest that Yoga Nidra activates brain regions involved in relaxation and emotional regulation, including the prefrontal cortex and anterior cingulate cortex, thereby enhancing the capacity to manage stress and mental chatter that often disrupts sleep [4].

The accessibility and adaptability of Yoga Nidra make it an attractive intervention for diverse populations. It can be practiced lying down, making it suitable for individuals with physical limitations or chronic illness. Sessions typically last between 20 to 45 minutes and can be self-guided via recordings or led by trained instructors, offering flexibility in delivery. Its low cost and minimal risk of side effects also contribute to its appeal as a sustainable sleep aid for those seeking alternatives to medication [5-6].

In addition to managing primary insomnia, Yoga Nidra has shown potential benefits for individuals with secondary sleep disturbances caused by medical conditions such as fibromyalgia, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and menopausal symptoms. For example, patients with PTSD often experience nightmares and hyperarousal that impair sleep, and Yoga Nidra's deep relaxation and mindful awareness can reduce these symptoms and improve sleep continuity. Similarly, menopausal women practicing Yoga Nidra report decreased night sweats and better sleep quality, contributing to enhanced quality of life [7-8].

While the evidence supporting Yoga Nidra is encouraging, further research is needed to establish standardized protocols regarding frequency, duration, and integration with other treatments. Many existing studies involve small sample sizes or rely on self-reported sleep measures, underscoring the need for larger randomized controlled trials with objective sleep assessments such as polysomnography or actigraphy. Additionally, exploration into the neurobiological mechanisms behind Yoga Nidra's effects on sleep could help optimize its application and personalize treatment [9-10].

Correspondence to: Kaelan Vireth, Department of Neurology, Nakamura Gakuen University, Fukuoka, Japan, E-mail: Virethkea56@gmail.com

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CONCLUSION

Yoga Nidra represents a powerful and accessible mind-body intervention for managing insomnia and sleep disorders. By promoting deep relaxation, reducing stress-related hyperarousal, and improving emotional regulation, Yoga Nidra offers a holistic approach to restoring healthy sleep patterns. As interest in non-pharmacological therapies grows, integrating Yoga Nidra into clinical practice and wellness programs may provide an effective complementary option for individuals struggling with sleep difficulties, ultimately enhancing overall health and quality of life.

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