

“Mummy, I can’t sleep”

How to get restless children down

By Loraine Rushton

Sleep-deprivation and sleepless nights are one of the most common complaints I hear from parents when they bring their children to yoga classes. But once the children start yoga, the overwhelming response is how calm they are for the rest of the evening and how soundly they sleep. Many behavioural issues in children stem from a lack of sleep and in today’s fast-paced, digital life, their little bodies and minds get very limited respite. So when bedtime comes, it’s difficult for their bodies and minds to shut off. Yoga re-educates children how to self-calm and regulate their minds and emotions and best of all, can lead to a deep rejuvenating sleep.

Here are three great exercises to do before bedtime which will channel excess energy and calm those little minds and bodies. The breathing and relaxation exercises are designed for when kids are tucked up in bed, just about to fall asleep, but you can also do them anytime children need some much needed quiet, calm and relaxation time.

BEDTIME YOGA POSE

Child’s Pose: Curl up into a little ball. Tell your little one to tuck their chin in and nestle their forehead into the floor. Bring their arms down by their sides. Perhaps tell them to imagine they are a little seed planted deep into the earth. “It’s warm and

snug and you feel safe and secure. Feel the softness of the earth, the warmth against your skin and the rich smell of the soil around you.” Tell them to get very comfortable as if they are settling in for winter, staying very quiet and very still. Hold the pose for 2 -3 minutes.

BELLY BREATHING

Lay them on their backs, with their feet apart and their hands on their bellies. Tell them to take a big breath in and a big breath out. Repeat. Say, “Maybe you can feel some movement underneath your hands when you breathe in and movement when you breathe out.” Get them to notice how their belly rises as they breathe in and falls as they breathe out. Tell them to watch the belly rises and falls. Ask them how they feel and if they feel calmer. Aim for 5 minutes.

WAVE RELAXATION

Lay them on their backs, turn their palms up, let their feet flop out to the sides and ask them to pull their chin in slightly into their chests. Tell them to relax every part of the body and close their eyes. You are going to guide them to relax all of the body starting with the face.

“Scrunch up your face and let it relax, hunch up your shoulders and let them relax,” you quietly instruct. “Lift up your right arm and make it

stiff, then let it relax down. Lift up the left arm and make it stiff, then let it relax softly down. Make your hands into fists – tight – and let them relax. Scrunch up your toes and let them relax. Feel your whole belly relax, your back relax, your whole body is still and relaxed.”

Get them to imagine they are sitting by the edge of the ocean, watching the waves break, washing up to the shore and back. “You are watching the waves as they break and roll up to the shore and roll back out to sea, watching the waves as they gently roll towards you and away back out to sea.”

Get them to smell the freshness in the air and the saltiness of the ocean. “Can you hear the waves as they break and crash on to the shore?” Try for about 5 minutes, if they last they long before falling asleep.

Have fun trying out these exercises with your kids and if you do them at the same time, you might also just have the best night’s sleep in a long time.



Loraine Rushton is the founder of Zenergy Yoga. She has over 18 years’ experience teaching yoga to children of all ages. zenergyoga.com



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