

# Sleep Like a Yogi!

/ [Yoga Therapy](#) / By [Kaya Mindlin](#)

**In my early twenties I suffered from vāta type insomnia.** Each night I lay in bed in a silent anxiety attack – heart beating, mind racing with worries. Stemming from childhood shock and loss, I felt stuck in the pattern of nighttime anxiety, until I combined daily yoga to open my spine, daily ujjayi prāṇāyāma in śavāsana & yoga nidrā.

In three months of consistent practice, the nighttime anxiety settled, and I was able to begin sleeping deeply, every single night.

Sleep is essential for mental, emotional and physiological health. A lack of sleep is one of the most primary causes of illness, while consistent nighttime deep sleep and dream sleep results in health, vitality, immunity and intelligence.

## “what is the best sleeping position?”

When I was in private practice as a yoga therapist, one of the biggest questions I received was “what’s

the best sleep position"... so let's take a look. Starting with a classic expression from vedic culture:

*“A bhogi sleeps on the belly,  
a rogi sleeps on the back,  
a yogi sleeps on the side”.*

Let's investigate each part...

**A bhogi sleeps on the belly...**

**Bhoga means enjoyment.**

A bhogi is one whose life is centered around pleasure. Every action is dedicated to the procurement of pleasure {and the funds it takes to invest in pleasure}. This kind of

person is described in the [Bhagavad Gītā](#) as ultimately suffering greatly.

Imagine a person coming home late from a night of boozing and eating and literally FALLING asleep face down on the bed. *That's* a bhogi sleeping on the belly. Now, if **you** happen to have a habit of sleeping on your belly {and many people do}, it doesn't necessarily mean that you are staying out partying every night; just take that as an extreme visual example. The truth is, habits develop for a number of reasons: from repeated patterns and conditioning to genetics and past life karma. But for a belly-sleeper, there may be a seed of a tendency to orient one's life in a rajasic way, around self-interest, self-concern, and pleasure. There may be a distaste for discipline or doing things that are out of one's comfort zone. There may be a seed of a tendency toward over-indulgence. Try to consider objectively... has your life any of these seeds?

Even if we can't see the cause of a person's belly sleeping, keep in mind that nothing is linear from the yoga perspective. Regardless of the cause, belly sleeping will also give the RESULT of excess bhoga – fixation on pleasure and distaste for discipline or discomfort. If you are sleeping on your belly, it could lead you toward more sensory excess in your waking hours and vice-versa. In my experience as well, belly-sleepers simply do not get good quality sleep, and studies have shown that depletion of sleep leads to sense pleasure-seeking during one's waking hours {this is a specific hormonal impact of sleep depletion that accounts for weight gain and food cravings}

**Belly sleeping can lead to neck and low back pain, contribute to differences between the two sides of your body, and increase pleasure-seeking during your waking hours.**

*A remedy is to add more discipline into your waking hours – such as an earlier wake-up time followed by a spiritual practice of some kind, regular bedtime, and regular meal times.*

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# A Rogi Sleeps on the Back...

**Roga means illness.**

A rogi is a physically unwell person; the term also refers to a person whose mind is stuck in a tendency toward bogginess, lethargy, neglect, avoidance, and delusion. These tendencies lead to illness of the body and mind.

Imagine the last time you had a head cold. You probably slept on your back in order to breathe better. In addition, anyone who has ever suffered a back or shoulder injury knows that the only way they could sleep was on their back.

Now, as with belly sleeping, the root cause of one's back sleeping may not be readily seeable. It may be a habit developed over time. However, from the Vedic perspective, it will mean that there are seeds {whether due to karma, genetics, habits, conditioning} of the

qualities of a rogi – a tendency toward avoidance, neglect {of self or other} and so on. In addition, cyclically, if you sleep on your back over time, illness will result. In other words, folks with back pain generally find that sleeping on the back allows a few zzz's, but never really resolves the pain, or find they get sick more frequently or suffer from mental disturbance such as depression or anxiety.

**Back sleeping can lead to sleep apnea, illness, and head fogginess, and while it is at least better than not sleeping at all due to discomfort, long-term back sleeping can prevent someone in pain from actually getting better, keeping your aches and pains in a holding pattern. Back sleepers, like belly-sleepers, are not getting high-quality sleep.**

**A remedy is to take more action in your life, starting with waking up earlier and gently moving the body. It is also advised to avoid daytime napping and save the sleep for a deeper nighttime sleep.**

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## A Yogi Sleeps on the Side

In this context, a “yogi” means a wise & well person who is living easefully in accord with natural order.

One who is a yogi sleeps on the side, naturally. But... sleeping on the side consistently may also lead one more toward a yogic life.

**According to both the timeless Vedic tradition and modern science, side sleeping is ideal for the physical body. When we feel well, we naturally sleep on our sides. Sleeping on the side, we stay well.**

Side sleeping supports the natural sleep cycles from waking into deep sleep, into dreaming sleep, and so on. The good sleep that results from side-sleeping will lead to better physical and mental health, which supports greater spiritual growth, overall happiness, and a sense of well-being. Win. Win. Win.

And yes, it doesn't matter which side, and you can switch sides throughout the night.

You can increase your well-being during the day to increase your chances of side sleeping comfortably at night. You can increase your side-sleeping hours at night to increase your well-being during the day.

You may even recall that you used to happily and comfortably sleep on your side, but that you can no longer do it since your \_\_\_\_\_. {shoulder injury, back injury, sinusitis, allergies, alcohol consumption increased, etc.}.

Comfortable side sleeping can be a good gauge of your overall state of wellbeing.

## To Wrap up...

Good nighttime sleep is imperative.

AND... if you are going to sleep well, whilst preventing your body from being twisted and arched in all the wrong ways, your sleep position matters... AND if you are sleeping on your back or belly... you might need to pay

attention to what is going on in your life!

**Deep, restful, dreamless sleep is natural ... though, for some of us, it takes some simple remedies and lifestyle practices.**

The absolute best way I know to help your sleep is through ayurvedic lifestyle practices. I always give my clients personalized bedtime routines based on their individual body-mind constitution... PLUS specific sleep times, sleep herbs, and wake-up rituals. How you sleep deeply affects how you live, and vice versa!

In the **Nectar of Nidrā**, we go in-depth into the power of nighttime sleep from the Ayurvedic and Allopathic perspective {including all the many health risks of sleep depletion, which is growing chronic across modern cultures}. We also spend time learning how to assess sleep and remedy sleep issues with Ayurvedic measures. Better sleep leads to deeper *Yoga Nidrā* {in which you don't fall into unconscious sleep}.

**In the meantime... try sleeping on your side... “like a yogi!”**