



Patient Power

Meditation Practice for Restful Sleep

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Raquel Jex Forsgren:

Hi, everyone. My name is Raquel Forsgren. On behalf of Patient Power, we're so happy to welcome you here today. We're talking about our fourth topic in building resilience, and that's how do we take care of our health, in particular, how do we improve the quality and maybe even the quantity of our sleep.

So when we think about resilience within the context of how we look at health, health has three important pieces to it. The first is exercise, which most of you have had the opportunity to participate with Cathy Skinner, who leads incredible exercise programs for Patient Power. The second is nutrition, which you've heard from Julie, who is our oncology dietitian that talks about how to leverage that to maintain your health. And then obviously sleep.

When we look at sleep, on average in most publications about 35 percent of Americans are not getting enough sleep. It's double that for people who have cancer or for people who are taking care of people who have cancer. And sleep matters. We all know this, especially even as a yoga therapist I know this, but sometimes getting the right amount of sleep can be really difficult.

For someone like you who may be going through treatment or just diagnosed, there are a variety of things that keep us awake at night or keep us from resting even if that's during the day. That could be worry. That could be fear. It could be all of the emotions that go along with a cancer journey. It could be pain associated from our treatment or our disease itself. It could be sleep apnea. It could be a whole host of a variety of different things.

And so what we know, though, is the quality is so much more meaningful than the sleep itself, and there are a number of publications now using mindfulness, yoga therapy, different types of deep relaxations where when you looked at those patients in studies that were following a specific type of deep relaxation protocol, for lack of a better word, their sleep quality improved, the amount of REM that they were getting, which really allowed the brain to cleanse itself, lymphatics is what that's called. So when you look at the quality, that was even more meaningful than the quantity, the number of hours.

So what we're going to do today is I'm going to teach you two different techniques. The first is related to the emotions. I know a lot of us that wake up in the middle of the night, early morning, any of those hours, the mind runs off the ranch. It's fear, it's anxiety, it's thinking about the future, it's thinking about the diagnosis or the prognosis, and sometimes we just can't seem to calm the mind.

So I'm going to go over practice for you that I hope helps. I know it helps me when I have those moments myself. Then I want to teach you one that you can use several times through the day even as you're letting your body take a few rests. You can do it at home. You can do it in the chemo chair. You can do it anywhere except while you're driving.

So let's go ahead and sit up nice and tall. Most all of you who do these practices with me know that I always start from sitting up nice and tall or laying on your back. You can absolutely do that if you're watching this from your bed or your hospital bed or your chemo chair. But just relaxing, closing your eyes and bringing all the awareness to the very

bottoms of your feet, your heels, your toes, even the arches of your feet. See if you can feel those, just imagining it, feeling it.

And bring to mind for yourself something that keeps you awake or something that awakens you and disturbs your sleep. Bring to mind what that is. I think all of us can get there pretty quickly. Now, I want to visualize for you as you inhale, imagine you're leaning into that emotion. We've done this practice before. Lean into the emotion, really visualize it. Take another inhale, and as you exhale, breathe into that emotion, just telling yourself to let go. Just to let go. Take another inhale, exhale into that emotion, whatever that is, and let it go.

You can softly blink open your eyes, or you can stay right with this practice keeping your eyes closed. It's really up to you. I like to leverage this particular practice when I'm awakened and I just can't go back to sleep. I find this one works the best for me in that particular time, and it allows me to embrace what I'm feeling because you do need to acknowledge the emotion. We've talked about the importance of validating how you feel and why that matters.

And it's almost by leaning into or breathing into that emotion you allow it to relax. You allow yourself to let go and let the mind relax on its own, which in turn relaxes body, lowers the heart rate, lowers the cortisol, relaxes the nervous system. I hope you're starting to get the cycle if you've joined any of these topics. It's all about balancing the nervous system, right?

So for the second practice—and this one will be a little bit longer. So what we'll do is I would definitely say that if you're driving and you happen to be just listening to this and hopefully not watching while you're driving but listening. Don't try to do this while you're driving please. And if you're in a place where you can be in a very comfortable chair or lying down, you can do this both ways.

So go ahead and settle in wherever you are and close your eyes. Bring all the awareness to the very bottoms of your feet again, maybe the backs of the legs, backs of the thighs, resting wherever your arms and hands are, relaxing the jaw, relaxing the face, and just noticing how you're breathing and feeling right in this moment. Just noticing, not judging, just noticing.

Beginning to deepen your inhale. Let the ribs expand, let the heart, chest, the belly, let everyone expand. And exhale a little bit longer than your inhale. Then bring all the awareness down to the right foot and the right leg. Tense all the muscles and the toes all the way to the right hip bone. Inhale, and lift the leg about a half-inch off the floor or the bed. Exhale and relax the leg back down. Bring all the awareness into the left leg and left foot. Tense all the muscles. Inhale with the leg just a little off the floor, off the bed. Exhale and relax the leg down.

Bring all the awareness into your glutes, into your bottom. Squeeze both sides equally, and as you exhale, release the glutes, relaxing even more onto the surface that you are resting on. Bring all the awareness into the right arm, stretch your arm out, make a fist. Inhale, tense all the muscles in the shoulders, the hand, exhale and release the entire arm and hand.

Bring all the awareness into the left arm. Stretch it out, spread the fingers really wide, make a fist. Tense all those muscles from the shoulder and the hand, inhaling, exhale, relax the entire arm and hand. Bring all the awareness up into your face, your mouth, tighten the jaw, shrink and shrivel up your face, tensing all the muscles, wrinkle up your forehead, squeeze your eyebrows together. Inhale, exhale, relax the entire face, the jaw, top of your head, back of your head, just relax.

Take a nice deeper inhale, noticing how the breath might be changing, exhale a little bit longer. Relax even more onto the surface that you're resting on. Bring all the awareness back to the very bottoms of your feet, and as you inhale move the breath very slowly up through the shins and calf, through the knees, top of your thighs, hip bones, belly, chest, heart, lungs, throat, shoulders, into your face to the top of your head—all in one nice smooth inhale.

On your next exhale, move your breath slowly down to the back of your body, down your spine, into the bottom, backs of your legs, backs of your knees, all the way through the calves to the bottom of your feet. Bring all the awareness back into just the belly. Inhale deeply, and as you exhale send all of that breath down to the bottoms of your feet. Inhale deeply, and as you exhale send the breath just down the legs through the knees into the shins and the calves. Inhale completely. As you exhale, send the breath into the body, relaxing.

Inhale deeply. As you exhale, send the breath down your arms into your hand. Inhale deeply, and on your exhale send the breath into your heart, your chest and your lungs, relax. Inhale deeply, now on the exhale, send the breath into the shoulders, inside your throat, relaxing all your throat muscles. Inhale deeply, and as you exhale send the breath into the ears, the cheeks, nose, mouth, eyes, even the eyelashes and eyebrows. Relax.

Inhale deeply, bring all the awareness into the top of the head, exhaling, and let it move all the way down the back of the body until it reaches the very bottom of your feet.

Take just a few moments here to check in with your physical body, maybe your emotions, your mind. Notice how still and calm your body has become, your mind. Just notice that. Bring all the awareness now into the hand, and as you inhale imagine letting go anything that you don't need to carry around with you anymore as you exhale. Let it go.

Bring all the awareness into your arms, and as you exhale gently let go of anything that you don't need anymore. Nothing to carry around, no burden, just letting go. Bring all the awareness into the center of your heart, taking a nice inhale, and on the exhale filling your entire being with love, compassion for yourself, for those around you. Relax. Just noticing how it feels to allow yourself to let go, to honor your body, your mind, your emotions, nourishing with every healing breath.

And taking the time to do this practice maybe before you go to bed or before you need to rest and relax during the day to help your body heal, to help your mind and your spiritual self-heal. Noticing what comes up when you're in this type of a meditation and progressive muscle relaxation and breathing exercise.

You can softly begin to wiggle a few toes, wiggle a few fingers, and begin to slowly blink open your eyes, noticing how still and calm everything is just from a few moments of doing that practice. I find that particular practice is so helpful when it's very challenging to fall asleep. I definitely have done this when I've awoken, but falling asleep, think about what you're doing. You're lowering your heart rate. You're reducing stress hormones. You're relaxing your mind. You're just letting go of what's there.

And each time it comes back you witness that it's there, but you let go of it. Just keep practicing this, and I promise you it will definitely make a difference. It may not right for some of you. For others of you, it'll work like a charm. But don't give up. There's one thing we can control, and it's our breath, and if you can control your breath you can control your mind. And at the end of the day that's what we really need to do to help with our health and our journey.

I'm so happy you could join today, and I look forward to seeing you next month. We should have another topic. And have a beautiful, beautiful day.

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