

# Why Can't I Sleep? 4 Tips for Better Rest

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In the latest [Mindful Live](#) session, Michelle Maldonado discussed [resilience for divided times](#), and how that translates to our sleep patterns, with *Mindful's* editor-in-chief [Heather Hurlock](#). While answering a question from the webinar audience about dealing with ruminative states of mind before bed, Maldonado offered these four tips for better sleep.

# 4 Ways to Sleep Through the Night

## 1. Clear Your Mind Before Bed

Unattended thoughts can percolate and “hum right below the surface” Maldonado says, exhausting our energy and making us even more tired. Regardless of what you do or think about all day long, if you take a few minutes to meditate before you go to bed, you’re allowing your mind to let stuff out. Maybe instead of meditating, you’d rather put pen to paper and journal about your thoughts. No matter what you choose to do, give your mind some time to *dump*.

## 2. Try a Body Scan Meditation

Once you do get into bed, Maldonado recommends a body scan meditation that can help you ease into quality, deep sleep.

Try [this guided body scan meditation](#) to help wind down before bed. You may even find yourself drifting off to sleep before finishing the practice.

## 3. Listen to Your Body

While trying to sleep, you may feel something so intense that you have to get up. It’s normal to put off having to get up in the middle of the night because we know that it sends

awake signals to the body. "But sometimes you have to do that, too," Maldonado says.

When we hold ourselves back, and force ourselves to stay in bed, [we spend a lot of energy](#) and time fighting the urge to get up. Whatever your body needs, give it that support and allow for it to dissipate if possible.

## **4. Activate Your Parasympathetic Nervous System**

If you wake up in the middle of the night or can't get to sleep, you may consider turning to a type of breathing that helps activate your parasympathetic nervous system—"the part of the nervous system that helps calm the body," Maldonado says.

In this breathing exercise, your exhale is longer than your inhale. For the inhale you can follow a count of your choice, and for the exhale you double that count. It could be four and eight or five and 10. Choose a breathing count that you're comfortable with.

## **A Breathing Practice to Activate the Vagus Nerve**

- 1. Find a comfortable position**, sitting on the side of your bed or lying down.

2. **Start breathing in** for five, four, three, two, one.

3. **Breathe out slowly** for 10, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.

4. **You can repeat this sequence** as many times as you need.

"Oftentimes what happens is that [the breathwork] activates the vagus nerve." Maldonado says. "The vagus nerve wanders through the body and touches a lot of organs, reaching from the base of your skull all the way down to your colon. So it's all over and it's attached and infused to the parasympathetic nervous system."

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