

Yoga and Aromatherapy Improve Sleep in Menopausal Women Holistically

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Introduction

Menopause represents a significant transitional phase in a woman's life, typically occurring between the ages of 45 and 55, characterized by the cessation of menstruation and the decline of estrogen and progesterone levels. This hormonal shift often brings a range of physiological and psychological symptoms, with sleep disturbances being among the most prevalent and distressing. Insomnia, fragmented sleep, early awakening and night sweats impact not only nighttime rest but also mood, cognitive function and quality of life during the day. While conventional Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) may alleviate some symptoms, it is not suitable for all women due to potential health risks. Consequently, many turn to holistic and integrative approaches that support the body and mind without synthetic intervention. Among these, yoga and aromatherapy have garnered attention for their calming, balancing and restorative effects. Both therapies target sleep disturbances from multiple angles physiological, emotional and energetic making them particularly well-suited for the complex changes experienced during menopause. This review explores how yoga and aromatherapy can improve sleep quality in menopausal women by addressing hormonal regulation, nervous system balance and psychological well-being.

Description

Yoga, an ancient practice that integrates movement, breath control and meditation, offers a multifaceted approach to sleep health. For menopausal women, specific yoga postures and sequences can help reduce stress, calm the nervous system and stretch muscles that hold physical tension, which collectively contribute to better sleep. Slow-paced forms of yoga such as Hatha, Yin, or restorative yoga are particularly beneficial, as they activate the parasympathetic nervous system the branch responsible for rest and digestion. Through regular practice, yoga helps downregulate the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which is often overstimulated in women experiencing menopausal symptoms. Elevated cortisol levels, a hallmark of chronic stress, are associated with sleep difficulties, weight gain, mood swings and fatigue. By reducing cortisol through relaxation-based asanas and mindful breathing techniques like alternate nostril breathing (Nadi Shodhana) and diaphragmatic breathing, yoga assists in resetting the body's natural circadian rhythm. In clinical studies, menopausal women who engaged in yoga for 8 to 12 weeks reported significant improvements in both subjective and objective sleep parameters. These included shorter time to fall asleep, longer total sleep

duration, fewer nighttime awakenings and greater sleep efficiency.

Additionally, yoga practice improved mood, reduced anxiety and alleviated vasomotor symptoms such as hot flashes and night sweats, which are common triggers of nocturnal arousal. One randomized controlled trial published in Menopause journal found that women practicing yoga three times per week experienced a 66% reduction in insomnia symptoms compared to those receiving general health education. The meditative component of yoga also plays a key role by calming mental chatter and reducing ruminative thoughts, which are common during hormonal transitions. Aromatherapy, the therapeutic use of plant-derived essential oils, complements yoga by enhancing relaxation through olfactory pathways that directly influence the limbic system the brain's emotional and autonomic control center. Essential oils like lavender, clary sage, bergamot, sandalwood and chamomile have been shown to reduce stress, induce calmness and promote restorative sleep. Lavender, in particular, is the most researched in this context. Its active compounds, such as linalool and linalyl acetate, exert sedative effects by modulating GABA receptors in the brain. Inhalation of lavender essential oil has been shown to improve sleep onset latency, increase slow-wave sleep and reduce anxiety in menopausal and postmenopausal women [1].

Clary sage, oil used specifically for hormonal balance, contains phytoestrogenic compounds that may help ease hot flashes and mood fluctuations. Its anxiolytic and antidepressant-like effects can further support women experiencing irritability, depression, or emotional instability that interfere with sleep. Bergamot oil, known for its uplifting yet calming qualities, helps reduce cortisol levels and improves mood, making it useful for bedtime diffusion. Chamomile, with its mild sedative and anti-inflammatory effects, soothes both body and mind, enhancing readiness for sleep. These oils can be diffused in the room, added to a warm bath, applied via massage with carrier oil, or sprinkled on a pillow to create a relaxing sleep environment. Integrating yoga and aromatherapy into a bedtime routine offers synergistic benefits. For example, practicing restorative yoga in a dimly lit room while diffusing lavender and clary sage oil creates a multisensory experience that signals the nervous system to transition into rest mode. This holistic engagement of movement, breath, scent and mindful awareness fosters a deeper state of relaxation than either modality alone. In women who experience night sweats, certain cooling yoga postures like Viparita Karani (legs up the wall) combined with essential oils that balance the heat of the body like peppermint or geranium can reduce discomfort and minimize nighttime awakenings.

Holistic practices also empower women to take an active role in their well-being. Unlike pharmacological sleep aids, which may carry risks of dependency or morning grogginess, yoga and aromatherapy offer safe, non-invasive and sustainable solutions. They promote body awareness, emotional resilience and lifestyle balance, helping women cope more effectively with the physical and psychological changes of menopause. Furthermore, by reducing inflammation and oxidative stress two processes implicated in menopausal aging these therapies may also offer long-term health benefits beyond sleep, including cardiovascular support, cognitive clarity and improved immune function. While individual responses vary, most studies report that consistent practice over several weeks is key to experiencing full benefits. Women new to yoga should

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be encouraged to start gently and avoid poses that place excessive strain on joints or the pelvic floor. Essential oils should be used mindfully, with attention to purity, dilution ratios and potential allergies. Consultation with certified yoga therapists or aromatherapists can help personalize protocols based on symptom profiles and preferences. Integrating these modalities into a nightly routine such as a 20-minute restorative sequence followed by lavender inhalation or massage can create a ritual of self-care that reinforces the body's natural sleep-wake cycles [2].

Conclusion

Yoga and aromatherapy together provide a holistic, non-pharmacological solution for sleep disturbances in menopausal women, addressing not only the physical discomforts of hormonal decline but also the emotional and psychological stress that often accompanies this life transition. By calming the nervous system, reducing cortisol, balancing mood and promoting deep relaxation, these integrative practices help reestablish a natural, restful sleep pattern. Clinical evidence supports their efficacy, safety and synergistic potential when used regularly and mindfully. In a world increasingly reliant on quick-fix medications, yoga and aromatherapy offer a gentle yet powerful return to natural healing principles, empowering women to navigate menopause with grace, balance and inner peace. As more women seek holistic approaches to health, these time-honored practices may become essential tools for enhancing sleep, vitality and quality of life during the menopausal years and beyond.

Acknowledgment

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Conflict of Interest

None.

References

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