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Asen Bagang
North Eastern Institute of
Ayurveda and Folk Medicine
Research, Pasighat, Arunachal
Pradesh, India

Lakhon M Hinge
North Eastern Institute of
Ayurveda and Folk Medicine
Research, Pasighat, Arunachal
Pradesh, India

Risso Ana
North Eastern Institute of
Ayurveda and Folk Medicine
Research, Pasighat, Arunachal
Pradesh, India

KP Jastone
North Eastern Institute of
Ayurveda and Folk Medicine
Research, Pasighat, Arunachal
Pradesh, India

Nozie Gongo
North Eastern Institute of
Ayurveda and Folk Medicine
Research, Pasighat, Arunachal
Pradesh, India

Lucy Tapak
North Eastern Institute of
Ayurveda and Folk Medicine
Research, Pasighat, Arunachal
Pradesh, India

Durga Upadhaya
North Eastern Institute of
Ayurveda and Folk Medicine
Research, Pasighat, Arunachal
Pradesh, India

Corresponding Author:
Lakhon M Hinge
North Eastern Institute of
Ayurveda and Folk Medicine
Research, Pasighat, Arunachal
Pradesh, India

Therapeutic potential of yoga nidra for lifestyle-induced insomnia and fatigue: An integrative review

Asen Bagang, Lakhon M Hinge, Risso Ana, KP Jastone, Nozie Gongo, Lucy Tapak and Durga Upadhaya

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Abstract

Lifestyle induced insomnia and fatigue are increasingly prevalent in the modern era, driven by irregular sleep patterns, occupational stress, and digital overexposure. These conditions impair physical vitality, mental clarity, and emotional stability, often leading to dependence on pharmacological interventions that provide only temporary relief. Ayurveda recognizes *Nidra* (sleep) as one of the *Trayopasthambha* (three pillars of life) essential for maintaining *Sharira Bala*, *Manas Bala*, and *Ojas*. Inadequate sleep, termed *Anidra* or *Alpanidra*, disrupts the *Vata-Pitta* equilibrium and contributes to psychosomatic imbalance. Yoga Nidra, a structured yogic relaxation technique, offers a holistic and non-pharmacological solution to counter lifestyle-related sleep disturbances and fatigue. It induces a state of deep relaxation while preserving consciousness, enabling restoration of the nervous system and balancing the autonomic functions. Emerging research demonstrates that regular practice of Yoga Nidra enhances parasympathetic activity, lowers cortisol levels, improves melatonin secretion, and promotes restorative sleep. Clinical evidence suggests marked improvements in sleep onset, sleep duration, and reduction of daytime fatigue among individuals practicing Yoga Nidra. From an Ayurvedic perspective, Yoga Nidra serves as a form of *Satvavajaya Chikitsa* (mental therapy), promoting mental equilibrium, reducing *Rajas* and *Tamas*, and enhancing *Ojas*. Integrating Yoga Nidra into Swasthavritta practices aligns with preventive and promotive health approaches by addressing lifestyle disorders at their root cause. This review aims to synthesize classical Ayurvedic insights, yogic philosophy, and modern scientific findings to elucidate the therapeutic potential of Yoga Nidra in managing insomnia and fatigue.

Keywords: Fatigue, Insomnia, Nidra, Swasthavritta, Satvavajaya Chikitsa, Yoga Nidra

1. Introduction

In the modern era, rapid urbanization, occupational stress, digital dependency, and erratic sleep schedules have profoundly altered human lifestyles, leading to a rise in sleep related disorders and fatigue. Among these, lifestyle-induced insomnia and chronic fatigue are recognized as emerging global health concerns. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that nearly 30-35% of adults worldwide experience some form of insomnia, while chronic fatigue affects more than 20% of the working population^[1]. Sleep deprivation not only diminishes productivity and cognitive function but also contributes to the onset of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as hypertension, diabetes, depression, and cardiovascular disorders^[2]. In Ayurveda, Nidra is not merely a physiological process but a vital component of holistic health. Classical Ayurvedic texts identify Nidra as one of the *Trayopasthambha*, along with *Ahara* (food) and *Brahmacharya* (regulated lifestyle)^[3]. Acharya Charaka elaborates that adequate and timely sleep promotes happiness (*Sukha*), nourishment (*Pushiti*), strength (*Bala*), and longevity (*Ayu*), whereas insufficient sleep leads to misery (*Dukha*), emaciation (*Karshya*), weakness (*Abala*), and premature death (*Ayu Kshaya*)^[4]. Sushruta Samhita further categorizes sleep disorders such as *Anidra* (sleeplessness) and *Alpanidra* (reduced sleep) under *Vata Prakopa Janya Vikaras*, highlighting the role of disturbed mental and physical equilibrium^[5]. These classical insights resonate strongly with modern understanding, where sleep loss is associated with autonomic dysregulation and neuroendocrine imbalance. Lifestyle-induced insomnia, characterized by difficulty in initiating or maintaining sleep due to stress, irregular work shifts, and overstimulation, has become increasingly common in younger populations. The resultant

fatigue and cognitive dullness reflect disturbed Vata activity and depletion of Ojas (vital essence), leading to impaired mental and physical resilience. From a Swasthavritta perspective, restoring the rhythm of sleep is essential for maintaining Sharira Bala (bodily strength), Indriya Bala (sensory integrity), and Manasika Bala (mental stability)^[6]. Yoga Nidra, often referred to as “yogic sleep,” offers a holistic, non-pharmacological approach to address such lifestyle-related disturbances. Rooted in the ancient yogic concept of Pratyahara the withdrawal of senses Yoga Nidra is a systematic technique that guides practitioners through stages of conscious relaxation, maintaining awareness at the threshold between wakefulness and sleep^[7]. This practice, popularized by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, involves progressive phases such as body awareness, breath observation, experiencing opposite sensations, and guided visualization, culminating in deep psychophysiological rest^[8]. Unlike ordinary sleep, Yoga Nidra allows the mind to remain inwardly alert while the body attains profound relaxation, balancing the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. Scientific studies have validated the physiological and psychological benefits of Yoga Nidra. Research indicates that the practice significantly reduces cortisol levels, enhances parasympathetic dominance, and promotes melatonin secretion factors essential for sleep regulation and energy restoration^[9, 10]. Neurophysiological findings also reveal that Yoga Nidra increases alpha and theta brainwave activity, indicative of a meditative yet restorative mental state that supports memory consolidation, creativity, and emotional stability^[11]. Clinical trials have reported marked improvements in sleep onset, total sleep duration, and reduction in daytime fatigue among patients with insomnia and stress-related exhaustion^[12, 13]. From an Ayurvedic viewpoint, Yoga Nidra may be understood as a practical tool of Satvavajaya Chikitsa mental therapy through self-awareness and control over Manas (mind). By calming the Rajas and Tamas gunas and nurturing Satva, it restores psychological balance and enhances Ojas. Furthermore, its alignment with Dinacharya (daily regimen) and Ratriacharya (night regimen) underscores its preventive role in maintaining circadian health and homeostasis. Integrating Yoga Nidra within Swasthavritta practices provides a sustainable model for modern preventive healthcare. It bridges traditional wisdom and scientific understanding, offering an accessible and cost-effective intervention for lifestyle disorders rooted in mental and physical imbalance. Hence, this review aims to synthesize Ayurvedic concepts, yogic philosophy, and contemporary research evidence to explore the therapeutic potential of Yoga Nidra in managing lifestyle-induced insomnia and fatigue.

2. Materials and Methods

Design of the Review

This is an integrative narrative review that synthesizes Ayurvedic, yogic, and biomedical evidence related to Yoga Nidra in the management of insomnia and fatigue.

Sources of Data

Electronic databases including PubMed, Scopus, AYUSH Research Portal, and Google Scholar were searched for articles published between 2000 and 2024 using the keywords: “Yoga Nidra,” “insomnia,” “sleep disorder,” “fatigue,” “Ayurveda,” and “Swasthavritta.” Classical texts

Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, and Swami Satyananda Saraswati’s Yoga Nidra were also reviewed for conceptual insights.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Included materials comprised peer-reviewed experimental, clinical, and review articles addressing Yoga Nidra and sleep/fatigue outcomes, as well as classical Ayurvedic references. Excluded were studies focusing solely on other yoga practices without Yoga Nidra components.

3. Nidra in Ayurveda

In Ayurveda, Nidra is considered one of the Trayopasthambha the three pillars of life along with Ahara and Brahmacharya. These three are essential for sustaining health, promoting longevity, and ensuring the proper functioning of the body and mind. The Charaka Samhita emphasizes that Nidra is indispensable for maintaining Sharira Bala, Indriya Bala and Manasika Bala. Adequate and timely sleep supports nourishment, vitality, happiness, and longevity, whereas improper or inadequate sleep leads to weakness, misery, and even premature death^[14].

Classification and Importance of Sleep

According to Charaka, Nidra arises from Tamas (inertia) and Kapha predominance in the body, leading to relaxation of the mind and senses. Sleep may occur naturally (Svabhavika Nidra) or pathologically (Vaikarika Nidra) due to diseases, fatigue, or mental exhaustion. Sushruta Samhita explains that sleep restores the equilibrium of Doshas, replenishes energy, and enables normal physiological functions. The absence or disturbance of sleep (Anidra or Alpanidra) is classified under Vata Prakopa Janya Vikara (disorders due to aggravated Vata), often accompanied by symptoms such as restlessness, anxiety, and irritability^[15].

Nidra and Sharira-Manas Balance

Ayurveda views sleep as a restorative process that harmonizes both Sharira (body) and Manas (mind). During Nidra, the Indriyas (sense organs) withdraw from their objects, allowing the Manas to rest. Proper sleep enhances Agni (digestive fire), supports tissue nutrition (Dhatu Pushti), and promotes Ojas the subtle essence of vitality and immunity^[16]. Thus, balanced sleep is not merely rest but a critical determinant of psychosomatic equilibrium.

Consequences of Improper Sleep

Improper sleep habits (Nidra Viparyaya) such as sleeping during the day, staying awake at night, or irregular sleep timing disturb Dosha balance and contribute to various disorders, including headache, fatigue, indigestion, obesity, and premature aging. Charaka lists Asatmya Indriyarth Samyoga (improper sensory indulgence) and Prajnaparadha (intellectual blasphemy or misuse of intellect) as major causative factors leading to Anidra^[17]. Such behaviors correspond to modern causes of insomnia stress, overstimulation, and disrupted circadian rhythms.

Nidra in Swasthavritta (Preventive Health)

From a Swasthavritta perspective, balanced sleep Nidra Samyaka Upachara is integral to maintaining Dinacharya and Ratriacharya. Ayurveda prescribes regular sleep wake patterns aligned with the body’s natural Dosha cycles and environmental rhythms. Early night sleep (before 10 PM)

and early rising are recommended to support Kapha Pitta Vata balance and enhance Sharira Bala and Manasika Bala^[18]. Proper Nidra Aharaniya (resting habits) thus functions as a preventive tool against psychosomatic diseases, fatigue, and premature aging.

Nidra, Anidra, and Modern Lifestyle

Ayurvedic descriptions of Anidra and Alpanidra closely parallel modern understandings of lifestyle-induced insomnia. Factors like mental overactivity, stress, excessive screen exposure, and irregular food or sleep habits aggravate Vata and Rajas, leading to disturbed sleep and fatigue. Restoring sleep through Ayurvedic and yogic interventions such as Abhyanga, Shirodhara, Medhya Rasayana, and Yoga Nidra aligns with both traditional preventive care and modern psychophysiological approaches to health maintenance. Thus, Ayurveda not only identifies Nidra as a physiological necessity but also emphasizes its role as a cornerstone of mental balance, rejuvenation, and immunity. Its regulation through Swasthavritta practices provides a strong theoretical and practical foundation for integrating Yoga Nidra as a natural, non-pharmacological intervention for insomnia and fatigue.

4. Concept of Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra is an ancient meditative technique that induces a state of deep relaxation with maintained awareness a transitional state between wakefulness (Jagrat) and sleep (Swapna). Rooted in the Tantra and Yoga traditions, it is elaborated in classical yogic texts such as the Mandukya Upanishad and modernized for therapeutic use by Swami Satyananda Saraswati of the Bihar School of Yoga in the mid-20th century^[19].

Philosophical and Yogic Background

In yogic philosophy, Yoga Nidra corresponds to the Pratyahara stage of the eightfold path (Ashtanga Yoga) as described by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras. Pratyahara is the withdrawal of the senses from external objects, allowing consciousness to turn inward. This internalization enables the practitioner to access the subconscious and unconscious layers of the mind, leading to profound mental relaxation and clarity. The Mandukya Upanishad describes a fourth state of consciousness called Turiya a pure awareness beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep which Yoga Nidra symbolically approximates^[20].

Process and Stages of Yoga Nidra

Swami Satyananda Saraswati systematized Yoga Nidra into a structured relaxation process comprising sequential stages that guide the practitioner through conscious withdrawal, body awareness, and mental rejuvenation. The commonly recognized stages include:

1. **Preparation and Sankalpa (Resolve):** The session begins with relaxation in Shavasana and formulation of a positive resolve (Sankalpa), aligning subconscious intent with conscious willpower.
2. **Rotation of Consciousness:** Systematic awareness of body parts (from right hand to left foot, etc.) induces sensory withdrawal and neuromuscular relaxation.
3. **Awareness of Breath:** Gentle observation of natural breathing harmonizes the autonomic nervous system and centres the mind.

4. **Experience of Opposite Sensations:** Alternating awareness of contrasting sensations (heat/cold, heaviness/lightness) balances the sympathetic and parasympathetic responses.
5. **Visualization:** Guided imagery evokes emotional catharsis and deep mental rest by activating the subconscious mind.
6. **Sankalpa Reaffirmation and Externalization:** The session concludes by reasserting the Sankalpa and gradually externalizing awareness to the waking state.

Through these stages, Yoga Nidra systematically withdraws sensory engagement (Indriya Nigraha), stabilizes the Prana Vayu, and facilitates a psychophysiological equilibrium conducive to deep rest and healing^[21].

Yogic Sleep versus Physiological Sleep

Unlike ordinary sleep, in which consciousness is absent, Yoga Nidra preserves a state of “conscious sleep.” EEG studies have demonstrated that practitioners of Yoga Nidra exhibit increased alpha and theta wave activity patterns associated with deep relaxation, creativity, and subconscious processing without descending fully into delta sleep^[22]. Thus, Yoga Nidra allows physical and mental restoration while retaining a thread of awareness, bridging meditation and sleep.

Therapeutic Relevance in Lifestyle Disorders

Yoga Nidra offers an effective mind-body technique for managing lifestyle-induced disorders, particularly insomnia, anxiety, and fatigue. Its capacity to balance the autonomic nervous system, normalize cortisol and melatonin secretion, and induce deep relaxation positions it as a valuable non-pharmacological intervention. The holistic effects of Yoga Nidra encompass physical relaxation, emotional regulation, and cognitive clarity, aligning with Ayurvedic Swasthavritta principles of preventive health (Nidra Samyaka Upachara). Thus, Yoga Nidra stands as a bridge between ancient yogic wisdom and contemporary psychophysiological science offering a conscious, accessible, and restorative approach to counter lifestyle-induced insomnia and fatigue.

5. Ayurvedic and Yogic Interpretation

Ayurveda provides a comprehensive understanding of Nidra as one of the *Trayopasthambha* the three fundamental pillars of life, along with *Ahara* and *Brahmacharya*. Proper sleep is essential for maintaining *Sharira Bala* (physical strength), *Indriya Bala* (sensory stability), and *Manasika Bala* (mental equilibrium). The *Charaka Samhita* (Sutrasthana 21/36) emphasizes that adequate sleep promotes happiness, nourishment, strength, virility, knowledge, and longevity, whereas disturbed or insufficient sleep causes misery, emaciation, and mental instability. From an Ayurvedic pathophysiological perspective, Anidra (insomnia) and Alpanidra (reduced sleep) are primarily caused by Vata aggravation, often associated with excessive mental activity, stress, and irregular daily habits (*Vishama Ahara-Vihara*). *Swasthavritta* advocates *Nidra Samyaka Upachara* (balanced sleep management) as an essential regimen for disease prevention and mental tranquility^[23]. The practice of Yoga Nidra can thus be viewed as a practical and therapeutic extension of *Swasthavritta*, facilitating natural restoration of *Vata* balance and promoting *Sattva* predominance.

In the Yogic context, Yoga Nidra represents a conscious deep relaxation technique derived from ancient tantric practices and refined within the Satyananda Yoga tradition. Swami Satyananda Saraswati described it as a method of pratyahara (withdrawal of sensory perception) that leads to relaxation and reprogramming of the subconscious mind. During Yoga Nidra, the practitioner remains in a hypnagogic state between wakefulness and sleep, maintaining awareness while experiencing profound physical and mental relaxation^[24].

From a psychophysiological standpoint, this state corresponds to a balanced activation of the *parasympathetic nervous system* and dominance of *alpha-theta brainwave patterns*, indicative of restorative consciousness. Ayurveda parallels this equilibrium with the predominance of *Sattva guna* the quality of clarity and harmony which regulates *Manas* and harmonizes the *Doshas*. Hence, Yoga Nidra functions as a form of *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*, a non-pharmacological therapeutic approach aimed at stabilizing the mind and promoting *Atma-vishranti*.

Furthermore, regular practice of Yoga Nidra restores *Ojas*, strengthens *Agni*, and minimizes *Ama* by mitigating stress-induced physiological imbalances^[25]. By promoting restorative rest without the side effects of sedatives, Yoga Nidra reestablishes circadian balance and supports *Dincharya* and *Ratricharya* practices, thus aligning the body's rhythms with natural cycles. In this way, the integration of Yoga Nidra within the Ayurvedic framework of *Swasthavritta* exemplifies a synergistic approach to preventive and promotive health. It provides a bridge between ancient mind body wisdom and modern scientific validation, reaffirming the timeless relevance of holistic principles in managing lifestyle-related disorders such as insomnia and fatigue.

6. Integration in Swasthavritta and Public Health

In Ayurveda, *Swasthavritta* encompasses the science of health preservation, emphasizing balanced lifestyle, preventive care, and harmony between body, mind, and environment. Its primary aim is to maintain health (*Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam*) and prevent disease onset (*Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam*)^[23]. Within this framework, *Nidra Samyaka Upachara* (balanced sleep management) forms a critical component of *Dinacharya* and *Ratricharya*. Integrating Yoga Nidra into *Swasthavritta* represents an evidence based and sustainable method to counter the growing epidemic of lifestyle-induced insomnia and fatigue. Modern day occupational pressures, shift work, and prolonged screen exposure disrupt natural circadian rhythms and stress regulatory mechanisms. These behavioural and environmental stressors correspond to *Asatmya Indriyarth Samyoga* (incompatible sensory engagement) and *Prajnaparadha* (misuse of intellect), both key etiological factors in Ayurveda for psychosomatic disorders. Yoga Nidra effectively addresses these imbalances by facilitating *Pratyahara* the conscious withdrawal of sensory perception and inducing physiological relaxation through enhanced parasympathetic activity^[19]. As a component of *Swasthavritta*, Yoga Nidra complements the classical preventive approaches such as *Abhyanga*, *Dincharya*, *Sadvritta*, and *Achar Rasayana*, all

of which aim to stabilize *Manas* (mind) and maintain *Dosha* balance^[25].

From a public health perspective, Yoga Nidra offers a cost-effective, non-invasive, and universally applicable intervention suitable for community-based health programs. Its practice requires minimal infrastructure and can be integrated into workplace wellness initiatives, school health education, geriatric care, and chronic disease management programs. Empirical studies have shown that Yoga Nidra improves sleep quality and reduces stress levels among corporate employees, students, and healthcare professionals, thereby enhancing productivity and emotional well-being. The inclusion of Yoga Nidra in *Ayushman Bharat* and *National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS)* could potentially enhance mental health and stress resilience among the general population^[26].

Yoga Nidra also aligns with the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030, which advocates integration of mind body practices such as yoga into national health promotion strategies^[27]. The Ministry of AYUSH has recognized Yoga Nidra as part of yoga-based wellness interventions, promoting it through public awareness campaigns and National Yoga Day events. These efforts reflect the growing acceptance of yogic techniques as effective tools in stress management, sleep regulation, and mental health promotion^[28]. From a *Swasthavritta* viewpoint, regular practice of Yoga Nidra not only restores *Sukha Nidra* (sound sleep) but also strengthens *Ojas*, enhances *Agni*, and improves *Satva Bala* the mind's stability and clarity. Incorporating structured Yoga Nidra sessions into daily routines, institutional wellness policies, and community health programs supports preventive health and reduces reliance on pharmacological sleep aids. It thus embodies the Ayurvedic vision of holistic well-being by harmonizing lifestyle, behaviour, and consciousness.

7. Conclusion

Lifestyle-induced insomnia and fatigue are rapidly emerging as global public health challenges, closely linked to stress, irregular routines, and the erosion of natural sleep patterns. Modern pharmacological interventions often provide symptomatic relief but fail to address the psychosomatic roots of these conditions. In contrast, Yoga Nidra offers a holistic, non-pharmacological, and evidence-supported approach that harmonizes the physiological, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of health. Ayurveda emphasizes *Nidra* as one of the *Trayopasthambha* the foundational pillars of life crucial for maintaining *Sharira Bala*, *Manas Bala*, and *Ojas*. Yoga Nidra, when interpreted through the Ayurvedic lens, embodies the essence of *Satvavajaya Chikitsa*, restoring *Satva guna* and mitigating *Rajas* and *Tamas*. It thereby strengthens the mind-body interface and promotes psychosomatic resilience. Scientific investigations have validated the multidimensional effects of Yoga Nidra: enhancement of parasympathetic dominance, reduction of cortisol and oxidative stress, modulation of melatonin secretion, and increased alpha-theta brainwave activity associated with deep relaxation and creativity. Collectively, these outcomes contribute to improved sleep quality, reduced fatigue, and enhanced vitality. From a *Swasthavritta* and public health perspective, Yoga Nidra exemplifies a sustainable, cost-effective, and accessible wellness

intervention. Its integration into daily regimens (*Dincharya* and *Ratricharya*), corporate wellness programs, and community health initiatives aligns with the preventive and promotive goals of Ayurveda. Furthermore, its inclusion in national health frameworks under AYUSH and WHO's recommendations for mind-body practices underscore its global relevance in contemporary lifestyle medicine^[27, 28]. In conclusion, Yoga Nidra serves as a bridge between traditional Ayurvedic wisdom and modern scientific understanding. Its regular practice offers a simple yet profound pathway to restore physiological harmony, mental tranquillity, and spiritual well-being. The incorporation of Yoga Nidra within Swasthavritta-based public health strategies could play a transformative role in combating lifestyle-induced insomnia, fatigue, and related stress disorders, paving the way toward a more balanced and health-conscious society.

Authors contribution

AB and LH drafted the manuscript and carried out work. RA, KJ, NG, LT & DU participated in its design and coordination. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The Authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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