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MUDRAS & MANICURE is back! In the second instalment, let's flex our fingers and bend our reality for the sake of a better night's sleep. New here? Wonder what's this MUDRAS & MANICURE thing's about? In the series MUDRAS & MANICURE I share my favourite mudras fit for the season. Mudras are a part of yoga practice: symbolic meditation gestures. I hope it's also a fun way to show a tox-free (or: as-tox-free-as-possible) manicure to spark curiosity among people who are most interested in beauty. In the first post of the series, readers suggested that we look next at mudras that support a good night's sleep. And I'm too happy to share my favourites with you today. BUT CAN MUDRAS REALLY HELP? Can gestures nicknamed "finger yoga" really heal insomnia? Just like about any grave symptom, insomnia can have various reasons that are best explored medically. In medicine, there's a discrimination of primary versus secondary insomnia. Primary insomnia is a sleep disorder that's not linked to a health condition (can be caused by emotional stress, or can be a sleep disorder "on its own"), whereas secondary insomnia is a sleep problem caused by a health condition, by a medical treatment, by pain, or by intake of caffeine or alcohol. Insomnia can be chronic or acute. Let's be clear here: Meditating to support a medical treatment is a brilliant idea, meditating before going to a medical treatment is a good idea, but meditating instead of a treatment is the worst thing one can do. So we'll be talking about the situation when we lose sleep due to a late night meal, or due to stress that has built up, even so-called positive stress can have this impact. It's always crucial to understand where your insomnia might be rooted. WHEN I'M SLEEPLESS FROM DUSK TILL DAWN While I personally tend to fall asleep when stressed rather than toss and turn in bed, if I miss my personal bedtime(s) at 9 pm and 11 pm – that's when my body sends signals that we really, really should hit the hay – it can become impossible to find any rest. A very late dinner, binge-watching The Walking Dead, or an excessive round of TESO can have the same effect as well. And basically, if I'm not asleep by 2 am, I'll feel much better if I don't go to bed at all. So I have no experience with really bad, lasting insomnia but yes, there have been a few debilitating sleepless nights in the past. What I've experienced during those slumberless nights were clear signs of mental stress having accumulated in the body: clenched jaws, tense neck, headache, dry eyes, or just a neverending whirl of thoughts spiralling from worrisome to plain horrifying. So, if your emotional bandwidth is overpowered, your body too tense for relaxation to feel pleasant – this, ladies and gentlemen Adventurers, is where breath exercise, mudras, and meditation techniques kick in as your natural cure for insomnia. MY FAVOURITE MUDRAS FOR BETTER SLEEP The first mudra we'll look at is the Shakti Mudra. 1. Relief for your sitting-down pains in the back and hips: Shakti Mudra. It's being held in high esteem among yogis and believed to cure chronic insomnia. My own experience suggests that a meditation when the Shakti Mudra is held does relax the pelvic/back and hip area – which is particularly prone to tension and spasms, just think of sitting in an office for 8-14 hours! Allow your imagination to help you with healing; let sensations of pleasant warmth, fluid flexibility and cosy, sleepy heaviness arise. The Earth has your back. All is good. Gravity relaxes the brain." – Vanda Scaravelli (Awakening the spine) You'll see variations of a Shakti Mudra if you look it up with different sources. Common ground: put together the ring finger and pinky fingertips; bend your thumbs towards the palms and fold the middle and index fingers over the thumb. Variations: sometimes you'll see the folded index/middle fingers close together and sometimes apart. Tip: breathe calmly but deeply, putting emphasis on breathing out – longer than you breathe in. It sounds strange if you're new to breathing techniques, but it's highly relaxing plus, it boosts our very natural "detox" system. However – don't over-practice this mudra. Tip: the Reclined Butterfly Pose (a Purna Titi Asana variation where you lie on your back instead of sitting) opens the hips and stretches your back and legs at the same time thus bringing great relief to the hip/flower back/pelvic area that feel tense and painful from all that sitting in your office chair. 2. Relief for your clenched jaw, stress-induced jaw pain, and tense neck/ solar plexus: Matangi Mudra. Have you, like me, gnawed up several mouth guards? Well I don't need any mouth gard anymore after only a few months of Matangi Mudra practice – says my dentist. I've held the mudra for ten minutes twice a day during my morning and evening meditation for a week in rotation: one week of practice, one week of rest, one week of practice. It does look like you're giving your insomnia the finger – the Matangi Mudra. Press your hands loosely together palm to palm, "clasp" your fingers just naturally but paying attention to the left thumb being on top, then extend the middle fingers and press them together. My experience with this mudra is that it helps find inner balance. Like most of those mudras that look like variations of hands folded for a prayer, the Matangi Mudra brings inner calm and harmony. Some sources report that you could cure the restless legs syndrome with this mudra (though I'd always opt for a blood screen/ magnesium supplement). 3. Insomnia prevention, mental clarity, creativity boost: Chin Mudra and Jnana Mudra. Sometimes we feel as though our life is made only of tasks we have to perform, obligations and duties and responsibilities. On a day that like that, going to bed feels like stealing leisure time from yourself! But sleep is so good for you... Don't let this panic of missing out get you – practice Chin/Jnana mudras, gestures of wisdom and knowledge, to connect, in your meditation, to something bigger than life. Find peace, find wisdom, find a blissful emotional coolness that comes with a clear mind. You know all answers to your questions already. The Chin (1) and Jnana (2) Mudras are held identically: thumb and index finger form a loose circle, other fingers are soft. In spiritual Hatha yoga tradition, the fingers downwards symbolise human life in earth while the fingers up represent the higher realms. Both mudras express, in Hinduism, the concept of unity of the soul of the universe with the soul of the single human being – which is such a beautiful concept for your balancing meditation. For convenience, hold the Jnana Mudra by placing your hands loosely on your knees, sitting comfortably. Comfortably doesn't mean slack away in a cosy reading chair though! So let's wrap it up: these were my favourite three mudras to relax stressed body and mind anywhere, anytime, a natural insomnia cure for stressful days and sleepless nights. Side note manicure: I'm wearing a soothing combo of Suncoat Polish & Peel in 'Greenista' with golden highlights on my index fingers made with Namaki '01 Gold'. But there are even more absolutely natural, time-tested tricks to facilitate a sound sleep, and these are: ✓ Eat foods rich in sleep-promoting tryptophan (find more info with a bedtime countdown, sleep killers and a list of foods here); ✓ Don't get too excited in the afternoon: intense workout, who-dun-it books, zombie movies are no bueno; ✓ Have a well ventilated, not too warm bedroom; ✓ Choose natural, non-treated fabrics for bed linen: actual unbleached, uncoloured linen is quite possibly the best choice, being naturally cooling in summer and warm in winter, stain- and moth-resistant; ✓ Latest research shows there are no natural "owls": humans are wired to go to bed with sunset and to wake up at sunrise, so try flying with going to bed at 11 pm – you'll find out that morning hours are way more inspiring and refreshing than you thought they were! (Always provided that there's natural sunlight when you wake up.) Lord Shiva in his Adinath aspect revealed many yogic principles and practices to spiritual seekers. In Hatha Yoga Pradipika, one of the ancient Hindu texts of yoga, Lord Shiva states that the practice of different mudras bestow on the seeker eight forms of divine wealth, can delay old age and even defeat death. These mudras are revered by all skilled seekers (siddhas) and were kept a secret for a long time. Prana Mudra - One of the Yoga Mudras Among these mudras, the Yoga Mudras were named so not because of their association with the physical act of doing yoga. But, these mudras followed the principles of Yoga Sutras in their entirety and could give all-round benefits to anyone practicing them. One of the most prominent of all the Yoga Mudras is the Prana Mudra. Prana in Hindi is defined as life. But, in Sanskrit, it is the name given to the life force residing in our body. According to Hatha Yoga, the five energies necessary for the balance of life are apana, vyana, aamana, udana, and prana. Of these, prana holds the greatest significance and by the simple practice of Pran Mudra, you can easily activate and charge-up the life force inside you. Five fingers - five elements The mudras involve simple linking of the energy points in our body. In the case of Pran Mudra, the practice involves just three fingers - thumb, little finger, and the ring finger. It isn't commonly known that our fingers represent the five elements with which this creation is formed. Of the five fingers, our thumb represents agni (fire), little finger represents jala (water), and the ring finger represents prithvi (earth). The imbalance of these three elements creates an imbalance of Vata Doshha in our body. And, regular practice of Prana Mudra is seen to remove the Vata Doshha imbalance and its effects that you have been experiencing. How to do Prana Mudra? The Prana Mudra is quite simple to do. Just join the tips of the little finger, ring finger, and the thumb together, with the other two fingers relaxed and positioned away from the joint. While practicing the Mudra, you should sit in a comfortable position in a relaxed corner of your house. Rest both the hands on your knees and then fold the fingers into the Mudra. While practicing it, give slight attention to your breathing patterns and allow the soothing effects of refreshed energy to calm your body and mind. What is the best time to do Prana Mudra? One of the best things about the mudras is that they can be performed anywhere, and anytime. Whether you are at home, taking a break in the office, or even traveling. However, there are measures you can take to enhance the experience of your Mudra practice. The best time to do Prana Mudra is in the morning, on an empty stomach. If you are doing it at any time of the day then make sure you are doing it after an hour of eating food. Practicing Prana Mudra can be a relaxing experience. However, the energizing aspect of it works even better if your mind is already calm. Therefore, doing meditation and then following it with Prana Mudra practice will give the best results. You can find a list of guided meditations by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, which can be followed by your Prana Mudra practice. If you don't have the time to meditate, then take a few long deep breaths before starting the mudra to calm your body and mind. The Prana Mudra should be done three times a day, for 10 minutes in a single session. If you cannot manage multiple attempts, then a single session of 20-30 minutes can also be done. While practicing the Prana Mudra, you can couple it with any chants that you feel are easy and relaxing. Whether it is Om chant, Om Namaha Shivaya Chant, Rama Chant, or any other you feel inclined to do. There is no specific asana mentioned for Prana practice. You can do it in sukhasana, vajrasana, or even padmasana. The success of the mudra practice depends on two factors - the calmness of your mind and the relaxation of the breathing patterns. This is why practicing it after meditating will give the best result Benefits of Prana Mudra The three elements associated with the Prana Mudra are also connected with the base of our spine. In terms of Chakras, Prana Mudra directly affects the Muladhara (Base Chakra or Root Chakra). It activates the base chakra, generating heat and energy in the body. Because of the nature of the chakra, Prana Mudra practice has many benefits associated with it. We will cover the specific benefits to the body first and then list out other common positives experienced after practicing this mudra. 1. Facilitates healing Our scriptures say that the first symptom of our body being afflicted by a disease is that of our energy, or prana levels, getting low. This is a symptom, and sometimes the cause of lowered immunity which invites disease into the body. Practicing Prana Mudra increases the Prana in our body, thereby enabling it to automatically heal itself. So, anytime you feel your energy lowering, just practice this for some time and you'll feel the prana jump right back up. Moreover, with the regular and proper practice of the Mudra, you'll feel more profound changes in your body, letting it get rid of any other ailments that you may have had. Some of the ailments that Prana Mudra can help in healing include: High blood pressure, joints instability, ulcers Heightened sensitivity and burning in stomach and throat Skin rashes, aging skin, acidity Mental tension and fatigue Impatience, irritability, increased frustration. All these issues of the mind and body can find relief with the practice of Prana Mudra. You can comfortably move from disease to energy, relaxation, and a renewed sense of calmness and purpose by practicing this easy Mudra. 2. Eye Benefits Practitioners of Prana Mudra have reported that their eyesight problems got reduced and sometimes even cured after regular practice. You can also reduce the number of your spectacles and have a clearer vision by continuously practicing this mudra. Those with weak eyesight wanting to see good results should do this Mudra for at least 15-20 minutes every day. This practice should continue even after the benefits desired by the mudra have been achieved. 3. Other general benefits Our body experiences cramps and leg pain because there is blood accumulated in those areas which restrict proper flow. Practicing this mudra removes the impurities in the blood, enhancing the flow and richness of it and bringing excellent healing benefits. Prana Mudra can greatly improve your body's immune system and it also stabilizes your mind. Many times, some psychosomatic issues like impatience, irritability, weakness, and mental fatigue bring problems in the physical body as well. Prana Mudra turns these issues into positivity, enthusiasm, delight, joy, and happiness. This mudra's relaxing and rejuvenating effect on the mind improves your awareness, focus, and productivity, thus helping you perform better in any task you take up. The relaxation effect of the mudra decreases nervousness and helps improve one's confidence. Prana Mudra also brings more balance and stability to the mind, thereby curing any sleeping or eating disorders you may have been afflicted with. Practicing this mudra also reduces, and sometimes removes, any deficiencies caused by a lack of essential vitamins (A-K). As you can see, the benefits of doing the Prana Mudra and the ease with which you can practice it show that this is the best practice that you can incorporate into your daily routine. For more information on other asanas, their benefits, and any chants or meditations that you can couple them with, can be found on the Art of Living app. We'd love to hear from you Leave your comments @artofliving

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