The Janki Foundation
for Spirituality in Healthcare

Report

Yoga & the Science of Sleep

Global Co-operation House, London
Monday, 27th July 2026, 7:00pm - 8:30pm

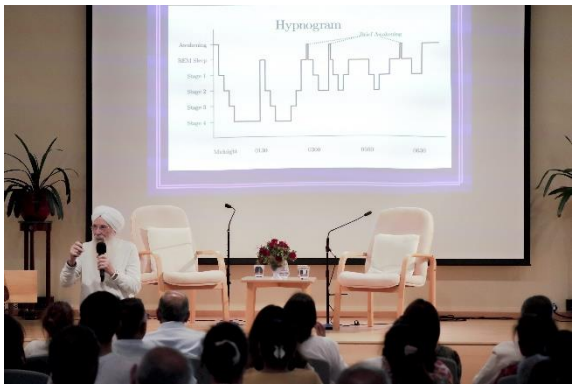
What if a single adjustment to your night-time routine could completely transform how you think, feel, and live? This was the captivating question that drew 150 health professionals, meditation practitioners, and yoga enthusiasts to a packed room at Global Cooperation House, North West London on 27th July 2026. They gathered for an in-person talk, co-hosted with the Brahma Kumaris (UK) and titled "Yoga and the Science of Sleep," to explore the powerful intersection of ancient spirituality and modern clinical research.

The keynote speaker was Professor Sat Bir Khalsa, a retired Harvard Associate Professor and renowned researcher in sleep biology and circadian rhythms. As a long-time practitioner of Kundalini yoga himself, Prof. Khalsa perfectly bridged the gap between rigid laboratory science and lived spiritual experience. He explored how sleep functions, the global crisis of sleep deprivation, and how yoga acts as a scientifically proven remedy.

The Biological Truth: Sleep is Non-Negotiable

Sleep is not a passive "switch-off" but an active, complex process consisting of four distinct stages. Our bodies move through repeating cycles, transitioning from deep sleep to light sleep. Deep sleep dominates the first few hours of the night to restore the physical body. Later in the night, Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep takes over. REM sleep is a potent psychological process where the brain sorts through the impressions, emotions, and ideas of the previous day.

When we compromise on our sleep, we rapidly accumulate a "sleep debt" over weeks and months. This debt cannot be erased overnight; reversing its damage takes weeks of consistent recovery. The amount of sleep humans need follows a classic bell-shaped curve across the population. While the average adult requires 7 to 8 hours (and teenagers need 8 to 10 hours), individual needs strictly range between 5 and 9 hours. You could be sleep deprived if you have a tendency to fall asleep unintentionally in passive situations like reading, watching television, lectures and meditation.



The modern world, unfortunately, is drastically out of sync with these biological needs. Roughly one-third of the population is chronically sleep-deprived. This deprivation leads to severe physical and mental health issues, including:
Physical Risks: Weight gain, diabetes, immune deficiencies, coronary disorders, strokes, hypertension, and increased mortality. Mental Risks: Anxiety, depression, chronic stress, emotional dysregulation. Approximately, 10% of the adult population suffer from an insomnia disorder and another 20% experiences occasional insomnia symptoms and impaired memory. Meditative movements such as yoga are effective in improving sleep disorders, sleep efficiency, sleep duration and daytime sleep disorders.

Deep Insights from the Q&A Session

The event shifted into a dynamic question-and-answer session, facilitated by Dr Sarah Eagger, Chair of the Janki Foundation and a retired NHS consultant psychiatrist. This session uncovered critical nuances regarding lifestyle, aging, and specific sleep disorders:

The Trap of Shift Work and Siestas: Sleeping during the day can severely disrupt our natural circadian rhythms, causing daytime fatigue, low mood, and "sleep inertia"—that heavy, groggy feeling upon waking. For cultures that practice a midday siesta, Prof. Khalsa advised keeping it under an hour to protect the benefits of consecutive night-time sleep.

Sleep deprivation: Prof. Khalsa dismantled a major modern myth: the "macho" boast of being a "power sleeper" who only needs a few hours a night. Science proves this approach simply does not work. Sleep is a strict biological need, not a luxury. Prof. Khalsa issued a strong warning to students who "pull all-nighters" before exams. Sacrificing REM sleep means the brain cannot process or retain the information just learned. To pass exams, sleeping every night is a biological prerequisite**.** The audience learned that the ability to sleep naturally declines with age, a trend that is particularly pronounced in females.

Defeating Insomnia and Hyperarousal: In chronic insomnia, body and mind arousal levels are scientifically high. Research shows that yoga reduces this hyperarousal. In fact, slow, deep abdominal breathing is proven to be even more effective at lowering hyperarousal than standard Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or progressive muscle relaxation. Additionally, yoga actively extends total sleep time.

Addressing Sleep Apnoea: A dangerous condition where airways collapse causing sufferers to stop breathing multiple times a night (often signalled by loud snoring). While medical interventions exist, evidence shows that yoga paired with a weight-loss diet offers significant therapeutic benefits.

Your Path to Balance

Prof. Khalsa's ultimate verdict was clear: yoga - which remarkably integrates physical postures, breath work relaxation and meditation - acts as a deeply restorative tool that improves both sleep quality and depth. While it cannot replace the hours of sleep your body fundamentally requires, it ensures the sleep you do get is profoundly healing.

Crucially, behavioural treatments only work if people actually commit to lifestyle change! Simple tools like using an eye mask and earplugs can help induce sleep environment harmony. Meditative movement such as yoga is long term work, it takes time to change your balance of stress hormones and dose responsive curves for sleep debt.

The evening concluded charmingly with 10 minutes of collective meditation, conducted by Sister Maureen Goodman, allowing the 150 attendees to instantly quieten their minds and soothe their nervous systems.

Take Action Today: To truly balance your health and wellbeing, intentionally weave more meditation, conscious deep breathing, relaxation and physical exercise into your daily routine.

A vast amount of instructive material was covered in this session. ***Click here to watch the full talk, the insightful Q&A session, along with the power point slides.***