

For A+ Heart Health, Get Your Z's

Settling in for a good night's sleep is one of the best things you can do to keep your heart healthy.

BY MELISSA PHETERSON

EAT WELL. EXERCISE. DON'T

SMOKE. These are common tips to enhance heart health. But did you know that ample sleep is just as important?

The American Heart Association added sleep to its checklist of essentials for cardiovascular health in 2022. That means there's never been a better time to prioritize getting a good night's sleep.



American Heart Association.



Fulvia Milite, MD
Sleep Medicine Specialist

"The evidence is now overwhelming that quality sleep contributes to heart health," says Dr. Fulvia Milite, Sleep Medicine Specialist and Director of the Sleep Center at White Plains Hospital. "Sleep deprivation has been linked to a range of heart conditions. And sleep quality is just as important as quantity. For those who have disruptive snoring or interrupted breathing, as happens with sleep apnea, the risk of heart

disease increases even more."

Dr. Milite breaks down what you need to know:

Sleep now or feel the impacts later.

"During sleep, your heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate all have the chance to come down," Dr. Milite explains. "Sleep disruption and deprivation take away this window of opportunity to rest and recover. Eventually, blood pressure that doesn't dip at night may increase during the day, forcing your heart to work harder." Insufficient sleep can also strain the heart by heightening the risk of weight gain. "Because sleep impacts levels of hormones that regulate appetite and control blood sugar, those who are sleep-deprived often have cravings or increased desire for high-calorie foods," she adds.

Aim for seven hours of sleep every night.

"Seven hours is the goal, but it varies, depending on the person," Dr. Milite explains. "Sleep deprivation is defined as less than six hours of sleep per night."

Watch for signs of sleep deprivation.

How do you know if you're sleep deprived? Some likely hints

include feeling drowsy doing daily activities, especially driving; struggling to function during the day; sleeping in for three hours on the weekends; and relying on caffeine to feel awake and alert, Dr. Milite explains. "If you feel happy, productive, and alert during the day, you're likely getting sufficient, quality sleep," she notes.

Make sleep a top health priority.

"Sleep permeates every aspect of our health. Unfortunately, many people still measure their productivity by how little sleep they get," Dr. Milite says. "It's important to stay active, but balance exercise with rest." So, if you're setting an alarm to hit the gym before dawn, remember that sufficient sleep is just as important as exercise.

Try a sleep study.

"At our Sleep Center, the goal for patients is quality sleep without disruptions," says Dr. Milite. For those with heart disease or diabetes, the Center coordinates with cardiologists, endocrinologists, and other specialists at the Hospital. For patients with sleep apnea, Dr.

Milite and her staff provide ongoing support beyond the diagnosis, making sure patients are using machines effectively and that they receive a mask that fits properly. "This is how our lab distinguishes itself — we don't just hand you a diagnosis and send you home. Our program also offers guidance on daytime or evening regimens to relieve insomnia and promote better sleep," she explains.

The bottom line: Healthy sleep habits go a long way toward boosting heart health!

Rest Up for Heart Health!

Insufficient sleep is now strongly linked to:

- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Atherosclerosis (the buildup of fat in the arteries)
- Heart arrhythmia
- Coronary artery disease
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Congestive heart failure

For more information about the Sleep Center or to make an appointment, call 914-681-2626.