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WOMENHEART  
THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR  
WOMEN WITH HEART DISEASE



Sleep has received a lot of attention for its role in overall health, including its increasing connection to heart health. The American Heart Association now includes "Get healthy sleep" in Life's Essential 8, the key measures for improving heart health. Sleep duration (~7 hours) appears to be the most favorable for heart health (and sleep quality are essential for good heart health. Unfortunately, women report poorer sleep quality and higher risk of some sleep disorders than men, particularly during times of hormonal fluctuations (the period around childbirth and during menopause).

# SLEEP & HEART DISEASE



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**WOMENHEART:** The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease is the nation's first and still only patient centered organization serving millions of American women living with or at risk for heart disease — the leading cause of death in women. WomenHeart is solely devoted to advancing women's heart health through advocacy, community education, and the nation's only patient support network for women living with heart disease. WomenHeart is both a coalition and a community of thousands of members nationwide, including women heart patients and their families, physicians, and health advocates, all committed to helping women live longer, healthier lives. To learn more or to donate visit [womenheart.org](http://womenheart.org).

# SLEEP & HEART DISEASE

During sleep your heart and vascular system get a much-needed chance to rest. As you enter deeper sleep, your heart rate and blood pressure slow down. Changes in heart rate and breathing during the night promote heart and vascular health. A lack of sleep can trigger stress hormones that keep your blood pressure from dropping and promote chronic inflammation, putting the heart at increased risk.

## Poor sleep is associated with increased:

- Blood pressure
- Weight gain
- Heart rate/arrhythmia
- Risk for developing diabetes
- Risk for heart events — stroke, heart attack and heart failure

Women with **irregular sleep schedules** are **nearly twice as likely to develop heart disease** compared to those with regular sleep patterns.

Women with coronary heart disease who reported **poor sleep quality** were **>2x more likely to have a cardiac event** than women who reported good sleep quality.

**1 in 6 women have sleep apnea**, with many more undiagnosed.



## SLEEP DISORDERS AND THEIR ROLE IN HEART HEALTH:

Sleep disorders have been linked with poorer heart health. The most common sleep disorders include:

- **Insomnia**, a disorder in which you may have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or getting good quality sleep, resulting in daytime drowsiness.
- **Sleep apnea**, a condition in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts during the night, preventing restful, quality sleep. Sleep apnea affects about 30 million people, but often goes undiagnosed.
- **Restless leg syndrome**, a movement disorder that causes an irresistible urge to move the legs, making it hard to fall or stay asleep. Women with restless leg syndrome are at higher risk of developing heart disease.
- **Narcolepsy**, a chronic sleep disorder that causes extreme daytime sleepiness and an inability to regulate sleep/wake cycles. Narcolepsy, and some of the treatment options (for example, medications high in sodium), put people at higher risk for high blood pressure, a leading risk factor for heart disease. There is a recently approved medication that is a lower-sodium treatment option. This may help patients taking medication for narcolepsy better align with daily sodium intake recommendations.

★ Sleep also plays a role in other risk factors that impact heart health. Not enough quality sleep can lead to poor food choices and inactivity. In turn, poor food choices and lack of physical activity impact sleep.

## TIPS FOR GETTING MORE HIGH-QUALITY SLEEP:

If you have trouble falling or staying asleep, talk to your doctor. They may refer you to a sleep specialist or recommend you have a sleep study. Getting enough high-quality sleep is essential for your heart health — it also promotes healing, strengthens your immune system, improves mood and energy, and enhances brain function.



Establish a regular sleep schedule – wake up and go to bed the same time each day, even on weekends.



Seek bright light, preferably natural light, during the day. At night turn down the lights and avoid blue light.



Keep your bedroom quiet, dark, cool and clutter-free. Make your bedroom a sleep-only zone. Do not work or watch TV where you sleep.



Avoid caffeine and alcohol late in the day. Nicotine is a stimulant and should be avoided.



Avoid heavy meals, excessive liquids and exercise within 2-3 hours before bed.



Turn off electronics. Go screen-free at least one hour before going to sleep.



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