EquaHeart

Sleep, stress and heart health

Adequate sleep and effective stress management help protect the heart, alongside healthy eating, regular physical activity and avoiding tobacco.



Adults should aim for 7 to 9 hours of good-quality sleep each night; adults aged 65 and older, 7 to 8 hours.

1 Why sleep matters

Consistently short or poor-quality sleep is associated with a higher risk of:

Hypertension · Diabetes · Coronary artery disease · Heart attack · Stroke

Obstructive sleep apnea

In sleep apnea, breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep, placing strain on the heart. It is strongly linked to hypertension and stroke. Signs include:

- Loud snoring, or pauses in breathing noticed by a partner
- Excessive daytime sleepiness or difficulty concentrating

If these apply to you, ask your care team about a sleep assessment. Sleep apnea is treatable.

2 Healthy sleep habits

Keep a regular schedule
Go to bed and wake at the same times, including weekends. Avoid long naps.

Create a restful bedroom
Keep it dark, quiet and comfortable, and use the bed only for sleep and intimacy.

Wind down
Limit screens for a few hours before bed and spend the final hour on calming activities.

Limit stimulants
Caffeine remains active for 4 to 6 hours. Alcohol and nicotine also disrupt sleep.

Daylight exposure
Daytime light helps regulate your body clock. Avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime.

If you cannot sleep
After about 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing in another room, then return to bed.

3 Stress and the heart

Stress often leads to habits that harm the heart, such as unhealthy eating, smoking, drinking more alcohol and less physical activity. Over time these can contribute to hypertension, high cholesterol and weight gain.

Depression and anxiety are common after a heart diagnosis. Tell your care team; support is available.

4 Managing stress

- **Deep breathing:** inhale slowly through the nose, hold briefly, then exhale slowly through the mouth.
- **Address problems early** and limit sources of stress where possible.
- **Exercise, eat well and rest,** which also reduce stress.
- **Seek support:** speak with your doctor if stress affects your work, relationships or alcohol use.

In crisis? Call or text **9-8-8**, 24 hours a day, anywhere in Canada.

Sources: Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada: Sleep; Condition risk factors; Stress (heartandstroke.ca). Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for Adults, 2020. Sleep and risk for heart disease and stroke, Arterioscler Thromb Vasc Biol 2026. 9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline.
This guide is general information and does not replace advice from your healthcare provider.

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