



DREAMING OF HEART HEALTH

Sleep well to take care of your ticker

When you think about heart disease prevention, the first things that usually come to mind are eating right and getting plenty of exercise. But you may not realize the role sleep plays in your heart's health. Getting enough sleep, especially the deepest and most restful kind of sleep, is important for many reasons, not the least of which is a healthy heart.

Sleep disturbances run the range from insomnia to breathing difficulties. One of the more serious of these is obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). People with OSA have repeated interruptions during sleep, when the main breathing passage in the back of the throat closes or becomes too narrow.

QUALITY COUNTS

Every time this passageway is blocked for 10-20 seconds or longer, breathing difficulty causes a brief arousal, which, even if it does not result in waking to consciousness, disrupts the quality of sleep. The drop in oxygen from not breathing, plus the increase in heart rate and blood pressure when the person wakes up, increases stress on the heart. The more frequent these sleep interruptions, the greater the impact on the heart and on the person's overall quality of life.

"Chronic lack of sleep, for any reason, affects mood, contributing to depression, anxiety, memory problems, and irritability," says Robert Ajello, M.D., board-certified pulmonologist and associate medical director of the Baystate Regional Sleep Program at Baystate Franklin Medical Center. "It also puts people at greater risk for falling asleep at work, behind the wheel of a car, or in other potentially dangerous situations. The good news is that there are a number of treatment options available, once the problem is accurately diagnosed."

MAKE A CHANGE

People with OSA often have a variety of other cardiac risk factors. Obesity is number one, as increased fatty tissue in the neck narrows the airway, especially when the person is lying down. Another is diabetes, especially when combined with high cholesterol and high blood pressure—also known as metabolic syndrome.

Fortunately, once sleep problems have been identified and treatment has begun, a person may begin to feel better fairly quickly. Patients often have more energy and enthusiasm for exercise, are less likely to overeat, and are more highly motivated to get healthy and stay healthy. ↩

WORK WOES

Are you always tired? Many third-shift workers assume that constant exhaustion is just part of the job, but there may be more to it. Excessive drowsiness may be due to an undiagnosed sleep disorder. Sleep problems can lead to everything from trouble focusing at work, to being unable to enjoy your life to the fullest.

The Baystate Regional Sleep Program offers convenient daytime polysomnography sleep studies for night-shift workers, and comfortable sleep rooms designed to minimize outside light and sound. All of our hospital-based sleep centers are staffed with board-certified or fellowship-trained sleep specialists and certified sleep technologists, ensuring you receive the most accurate testing and diagnosis possible. They use the very latest technology for the diagnosis of all types of sleep disorders, including sleep apnea, snoring, and restless legs syndrome.

For more information, talk to your doctor or call **413-794-5600**.

SWEET DREAMS

For tips for a better night's sleep, visit baystatehealth.org/sleep. If you think you may have a sleep problem, talk to your doctor or call the Baystate Regional Sleep Program at **413-794-5600**. In Franklin County, call **413-773-2932**.

