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## Brain Health Is Connected to Heart Health

Did you know that the health of your brain and your heart are connected? By keeping your heart healthy, you also lower your risk for brain problems such as stroke and dementia. Learn more about the connection between the heart and brain, and the steps to take to keep both healthy.

Your heart pumps blood through vessels to every part of your body, including your brain. Damage to blood vessels can lead to serious health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, and dementia. Keeping your blood vessels healthy can help you support a strong heart and brain.

### Unhealthy Heart, Unhealthy Brain

Some health conditions and unhealthy habits can damage blood vessels, putting your heart and your brain at risk for serious problems.

- A heart attack happens when plaque buildup or a blood clot blocks blood flow to the heart.
- A stroke, sometimes called a "brain attack," happens when a clot or a plaque blocks a blood vessel in the brain, or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. When this happens, brain tissue dies, which can lead to memory loss and disability.
- A type of dementia called vascular dementia can happen as a result of a series of small, "silent" strokes, sometimes called "mini-strokes." Dementia can cause memory loss, slowed thinking, and personality changes.



# How Does Sleep Affect Your Heart Health?

Getting good sleep isn't just important for your energy levels—it's critical for your heart health, too. Learn how sleep is connected to heart health.

Sleep is not a luxury. Sleep helps your body repair itself and supports overall good health. Getting enough sound sleep also helps you function normally during the day.

## How much sleep do I need?

Most adults need at least 7 hours of sleep each night. However, more than 1 in 3 American adults say they don't get the recommended amount of sleep. While this may be fine for a day or two, not getting enough sleep over time can lead to serious health problems—and make certain health problems worse.

## What health conditions are linked to a lack of sleep?

Adults who sleep less than 7 hours each night are more likely to say they have had health problems, including heart attack, asthma, and depression. Some of these health problems raise the risk for heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. These health problems include:

- **High blood pressure.** During normal sleep, your blood pressure goes down. Having sleep problems means your blood pressure stays higher for a longer period of time. High blood pressure is one of the leading risks for heart disease and stroke. About 75 million Americans—1 in 3 adults—have high blood pressure.
- **Type 2 diabetes.** Diabetes is a disease that causes sugar to build up in your blood, a condition that can damage your blood vessels. Some studies show that getting enough good sleep may help people improve blood sugar control.
- **Obesity.** Lack of sleep can also lead to unhealthy weight gain. This is especially true for children and adolescents, who need more sleep than adults. Not getting enough sleep may affect a part of the brain that controls hunger.



## What can I do to get better sleep?

- Stick to a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning, including on the weekends.
- Get enough natural light, especially earlier in the day. Try going for a morning or lunchtime walk.
- Get enough physical activity during the day. Try not to exercise within a few hours of bedtime.
- Avoid artificial light, especially within a few hours of bedtime. Use a blue light filter on your computer or smartphone.
- Don't eat or drink within a few hours of bedtime; avoid alcohol and foods high in fat or sugar in particular.
- Keep your bedroom cool, dark, and quiet.

Sleep helps your body repair itself and is crucial for good health.







## 4 Reasons It's Still Important to Get Your Flu Shot

Pediatric epidemiologist and infectious disease specialist Dr. Emily Godbout from Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU offers five crucial reasons everyone should get a flu shot this year.

1. **Flu shots help reduce serious respiratory illness.** While some people who get vaccinated may still contract influenza, the flu shot typically prevents about 70 out of every 100 people who receive it from developing a moderate to severe flu infection. So even though the vaccine might not completely prevent the flu, it can help keep you from getting sick enough that you have to go to the hospital. "Reducing the overall burden of respiratory illnesses is really important to help protect vulnerable populations at risk for severe disease," said Godbout.
2. **Flu shots are safe.** "The flu shot is very safe and effective at helping prevent severe disease and hospitalization," Godbout said. The doctor also pointed out that patients will not contract influenza from the vaccine. "The virus is inactivated," she said, "so it can't actually cause the flu infection after you get the shot."
3. **Flu shots are updated every year.** "The U.S. flu vaccine is reviewed every single year and updated to match circulating flu viruses," said Godbout. She also said that our antibody response – what helps us fight the virus – can decrease over time, so a yearly dose will help boost the antibody response before the start of the influenza season.
4. **A flu shot protects you throughout the season.** Now is a good time to get vaccinated. It takes a couple of weeks for antibodies to develop in your body, but the vaccination will continue to protect you throughout the worst months of the flu season.

## Establishing an Emergency Fund

If you look at your needs vs. wants, you probably will find some ways you can begin to save.

Financial experts generally agree the best place to start is to set aside money in an emergency fund. This fund protects you from the "what if" expenses that happen to all of us from time to time.

- What if the refrigerator stops working?
- What if I need a plumber?
- What if my car breaks down?

Of course, it's easy to use a credit card to pay for these expenses. But if you don't pay off the bill right away, you'll have to pay interest. After a few months, your balance could really snowball.

Not having an emergency fund is one of the reasons many individuals borrow too much money, resort to high-cost loans, or increase credit card balances to high levels. An emergency fund gives you peace of mind, knowing you can pay for unexpected expenses.

### Ways to Save

There are multiple ways to save money for an emergency fund. First, set a small goal and build from there. You could start with saving \$400 over a specific time period. Then when you've reached that amount, you can gradually increase your savings goal to an amount equal to one month's income, then three month's income, and so on.

- **Save automatically** – You can direct deposit a portion of your paycheck to a savings account, so you save without thinking about it. You also can use payroll deduction for 401(k), HSA and FSA savings and expenses.
- **Save your tax refund** – If you're getting money back this year, use it to pay down high interest debt or put it towards your emergency fund.

For more information and ideas about ways to save, visit: [www.americasaves.org](http://www.americasaves.org) – "54 Ways to Save Money"





## How to Cope With Job Stress

Whether you are going into work or working from home, the way you work now has changed. Anxiety and other strong emotions (from any source) can be overwhelming, and workplace stress can lead to burnout. How you cope with these emotions and stress can affect your well-being, the well-being of the people you care about, your workplace, and your community. In order to stay healthy, it is important that you recognize what stress looks like, take steps to build your resilience and manage job stress, and know where to go if you need help.

### Recognize the symptoms of stress you may be experiencing.

- Feeling irritation, anger, or in denial
- Feeling uncertain, nervous, or anxious
- Lacking motivation
- Feeling tired, overwhelmed, or burned-out
- Feeling sad or depressed
- Having trouble sleeping
- Having trouble concentrating

### Follow these tips to build resilience and manage job stress.

- Increase your sense of control by developing a consistent daily routine when possible.
- Take breaks from work to stretch, exercise, or check in with your supportive colleagues, coworkers, family, and friends.
- Spend time outdoors, either being physically active or relaxing.
- If you work from home, set a regular time to end your work for the day, if possible.
- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about negative things can be upsetting and mentally exhausting.
- Check on others. Helping others improves your sense of control, belonging, and self-esteem. Look for safe ways to offer social support to others, especially if they are showing signs of stress, such as depression and anxiety.
- If you feel you may be misusing alcohol or other drugs (including prescription drugs) as a means of coping, reach out for help.
- Store your medicines in a cool, dry place where children and pets can't see or reach them.
- Keep a list of all the medicines, vitamins and minerals, and herbs that you use. Share this information with your doctor at your next checkup.