myHealth CONNECTIONS
PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
ignites
Wellness Wednesdays
FEBRUARY, 2025 WEEK 2

SLEEP WELL, STAY WELL:

How Sleep Supports Heart Health

Restorative sleep is crucial for maintaining a healthy cardiovascular system. During deep sleep, the body repairs itself, including heart and blood vessels. Chronic sleep deprivation can lead to high blood pressure, inflammation and an increased risk of heart disease. Studies show that adults who sleep less than seven hours per night are more likely to develop heart-related conditions.

TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

Restorative sleep is essential for a healthy heart. Incorporating the following behaviors into your nightly routine can optimize your sleep heath:

Stick to a schedule: Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends.

Create a sleep sanctuary: Keep your bedroom dark, quiet and cool. Invest in blackout curtains and use a fan or white noise machine to block out any noises that may be disruptive to sleep.

Limit screen time: Power-off electronic devices at least an hour before bed. This reduces exposure to blue light, which can interfere with melatonin production.

Avoid stimulants: Reduce caffeine and alcohol consumption, especially in the evening.

Prioritize winding down before bed: Develop a relaxing bedtime routine, such as reading, meditating or taking a warm bath.

Visit this step-by-step guide for additional tips and suggestions for better sleep.

FOLLOW THE MOUSE:
We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

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Tools For a Restful Night

Suggested sleep aids that can make falling and staying asleep even easier:

- **White noise machines** create a calming soundscape that drowns out background noise.
- **Sleep masks** block out light to support melatonin production and deeper sleep.
- **Weighted blankets** apply gentle pressure that can reduce anxiety and promote relaxation.
- **Smart sleep trackers** monitor your sleep patterns to identify areas for improvement.
- **Non-caffeinated herbal tea** like chamomile or lavender can help relax your nervous system and signal your body that it's time for bed.

Sleep masks and non-caffeinated teas can create a sense of calm.

THE POWER OF NAPS

If your nighttime sleep falls short, a quick nap can work wonders. Short naps of 20-30 minutes can improve alertness and reduce stress without interfering with nighttime rest. For those who struggle with napping, "nap therapy" focuses on creating the perfect conditions for restorative rest during the day, helping you recharge without overdoing it. Here are 8 tips for getting the most out of your naps:

1. KEEP IT SHORT (15–30 MINUTES)

- **Why:** Napping longer than 30 minutes can lead to sleep inertia, making you feel groggy instead of refreshed.
- **Tip:** Set an alarm to ensure you wake up within the ideal time frame.

2. NAP DURING THE OPTIMAL TIME

- **Best Time:** Mid-afternoon, typically between 1–3 PM. This is when your body's energy naturally dips.
- **Avoid:** Napping too late in the day, as it may interfere with nighttime sleep.

3. CREATE A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT

- **Dark, Quiet Space:** Minimize noise with earplugs or white noise and use an eye mask or dim the lights to simulate a nighttime environment.
- **Comfortable Spot:** Choose a supportive chair or recline slightly if lying down isn't an option.

4. REGULATE TEMPERATURE

- **Tip:** A cool (but not cold) room temperature is ideal. Use a light blanket if necessary to stay comfortable.

5. RELAX BEFOREHAND

- **Tip:** Practice calming techniques to fall asleep quickly:
  - Take deep breaths or try progressive muscle relaxation.
  - Avoid stimulating activities like scrolling on your phone or thinking about work.

6. SLEEPING AIDS

- **Assistance:** Consider relaxing sounds or nap apps designed to guide you into a light sleep state.

7. WAKE UP GENTLY

- **Use:** A soft alarm tone instead of something jarring.
- **Move:** Stretch or splash your face with cool water to fully wake up and shake off any residual grogginess.

8. PRACTICE CONSISTENCY

- **Routine:** If possible, try to nap at the same time daily. This can train your body to fall asleep faster.

YOUR HEART DESERVES REST

Prioritizing sleep is a powerful way to support your heart health and overall well-being. By making small adjustments to your routine, incorporating naps, and using helpful tools, you can enjoy the restorative rest your body needs to thrive.

For more tips and tools to improve your sleep, dive into this BCBSIL article **'Create a Routine for Better Sleep'**. Together, let's make every night an investment in your heart health and happiness.

Found this week's edition of Wellness Wednesdays to be helpful? Spread the word to your co-workers so they too can make heart health a priority in 2025.

SOURCES: *NIH.gov*, *Sleep Foundation*, *American Heart Association*, *Sleep Well Blog*