



# BETTER SLEEP, Healthier Heart

You focus on staying active and eating well—but do you also prioritize your slumber? Missing out on a good night's rest can impact your ticker in a big way. Follow these rules to get quality zzz's. BY BARBARA BRODY

## SLEEP RULE

# 1

### Wake up at the same time every day

Your internal body clock controls when you naturally feel most tired and most alert.

If you opt to stay up late and then sleep in on weekends, it can throw off this process because your sleep and wake times are inconsistent. Researchers at the University of Arizona found that regularly altering your sleep schedule by just an hour—say, going to bed an hour later on weekend nights and waking up an hour later in the morning—could be associated with an up to 11% increase in heart disease risk. Try to stick to the same schedule seven days a week.

## SLEEP RULE

# 3

### Don't brush off insomnia

People who have trouble falling or staying asleep are more likely to have

a heart attack or stroke, according to a review of 15 studies published in the *European Journal of Preventive Cardiology*. Insomnia may mess with your metabolism, interfere with hormones, raise your blood pressure, and elevate levels of inflammation. While an occasional restless night might not be a big deal, if you toss and turn three or more nights per week for at least three months, see your doctor or a sleep specialist.

## SLEEP RULE

# 2

### Tell your doctor if you crave tons of sleep

If eight hours is good, 10 must be great—right? While individual sleep needs

vary, it doesn't generally work that way. "Too much sleep can increase the chance of having a heart attack or stroke," says Amgad N. Makaryus, M.D., chairman of cardiology at Nassau University Medical Center in New York. One reason oversleeping might be a red flag: Some people who snooze more are depressed, and depression is tied to heart disease. Aim to sleep between seven and nine hours, and if you routinely need more, discuss it with your physician.

## SLEEP RULE

# 4

### If you snore, get screened for apnea

Snoring is often a sign of sleep apnea, a condition in which you stop breathing

for several seconds at a time during the night. If you have this disorder, your risk of high blood pressure, arrhythmia, stroke, and heart failure goes way up. When you stop breathing momentarily, your body jolts awake and your stress response kicks into gear, says Marie-Pierre St-Onge, Ph.D., associate professor at Columbia University Medical Center. Consider a sleep evaluation to see if treatment with a CPAP breathing device is necessary.

## LET SLEEPING DOGS LIE—ELSEWHERE

Allowing your dog to crawl into your bed can disrupt shut-eye, says a new Mayo Clinic study. But good news: You likely won't lose zzz's if your pup snoozes in your room (results show you may even sleep better knowing Fido is there). So go ahead and let your pup nod off nearby, but in his own bed.