Allegany COUNTY New York

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# Wellness Without Walls

Volume 2 | Issue 1 January – April 2024 – Allegany County Employee Wellness

## Hacking Sleep: Engineering a high quality, restful night.

Sleep is just as important as nutrition and exercise when it comes to improving your health, performance, and body composition.

Good sleep helps our bodies and minds recover, keeping us lean, happy, mentally focused, and healthy.

But chronically bad sleep:

- makes it harder to get and stay lean;
- makes it harder to gain and keep muscle
- disrupts hormones;
- ages us faster;
- increases our risk of chronic illness;
- drains our IQ

Fortunately, research also shows that returning to adequate sleep can quickly reduce these risks. So how do we go about getting that replenishing shut-eye?

**Create a sleep routine.**

Just like you can't go from 0 to 100 first thing in the morning, you can't do the reverse at night — going from "on" to "off" in a few minutes. Your body needs transition time and environmental cues to wind down.

Our bodies like regularity. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day and night. While it might be unrealistic to do this seven days a week — especially if you have young children, try to be as consistent as possible.

If you're consistent, your body will know when to release calming hormones before bed, and stimulating hormones to help you wake up. You'll feel sleepy when it's time for bed and wake up more refreshed, often without needing an alarm.

**Keep alcohol and caffeine moderate.**

Genuinely restful and restorative sleep comes from deep sleep. Even though it seems like alcohol is relaxing, more than 1-2 drinks in the evening can interfere with deep sleep, as can too much caffeine.

### BY THE NUMBERS

**Top New Year Resolutions for 2024** *via Forbes Health*

48% Improve Fitness

38% Improve Finances

36% Improve Mental Health

34% Lose Weight

32% Improve Diet

25% More Time for Family

12% Stop Smoking

Whatever your goals, don't give up on them!

So limit alcohol to the suggested amounts, and reduce caffeine after 2 pm. Otherwise, although you may "sleep" for 7 hours, your sleep won't be high quality, and you won't get the recovery benefits.

**Eat and drink appropriately.**

Having a large meal immediately before bed can disrupt your ability to fall and stay asleep. Instead, eat a regular-sized (or even smallish) meal a few hours before bedtime. A nice blend of protein, carbs and fats will help to keep you satiated, and might even improve your ability to fall asleep as your brain converts carbs to serotonin.

In addition, try to limit your fluids 2-3 hours before bedtime. Drinking too much liquid shortly before bed can result in frequent waking for bathroom breaks.

**Do a brain dump.**

We've all done it: Stared at the ceiling, long after lights-out, obsessing about all the things we're supposed to do tomorrow, tossing and turning and getting more and more stressed by the minute.

Try this instead: In the evening, take a few minutes to write out a list of whatever's bugging you: Emails you need to send or reply to, calls you have to make, project ideas, creative thoughts, that thing you should have said to so-and-so. Whatever is in your brain, get it out and on to paper. It clears your mind for genuine relaxation.

**Turn off electronics.**

Digital devices stimulate our brain with their light, noise, and mental demands. Unplug from all screens — TVs, computers, phones, tablets — at least 30 minutes before bed.

Our brain produces melatonin as light levels decrease. Melatonin ensures deep sleep, and may also help regulate our metabolism. If we have too much light at night, we don't get proper melatonin production.

**Go to bed before midnight.**

Interesting factoid: According to some sleep experts, because of the way our natural circadian rhythms work, every hour of sleep before midnight is worth two hours after.

(Whether that's true or not, or whether it's even measurable, I'm not sure. But I've heard it repeated so often by sleep experts it's probably worth consideration.)

According to these experts, we're meant to go to sleep when it gets dark, and to wake when it gets light. That old saying about early to bed and early to rise still stands the test of time.

**Conclusions**

**Good sleep is crucial for good health.** There are no short cuts, despite what the "sleep hackers" say.

**Make good sleep a priority.** Your physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing will thank you.

**Think about good sleep as a 24-hour process.** What you do during your waking period will affect your sleeping period, and vice versa.

**Reinforce your natural circadian needs.** When it's supposed to be dark and quiet, make things really dark and quiet. When it's supposed to be bright, noisy, and stimulating, get moving with some bright light.

***Continued on next page after infographic.***

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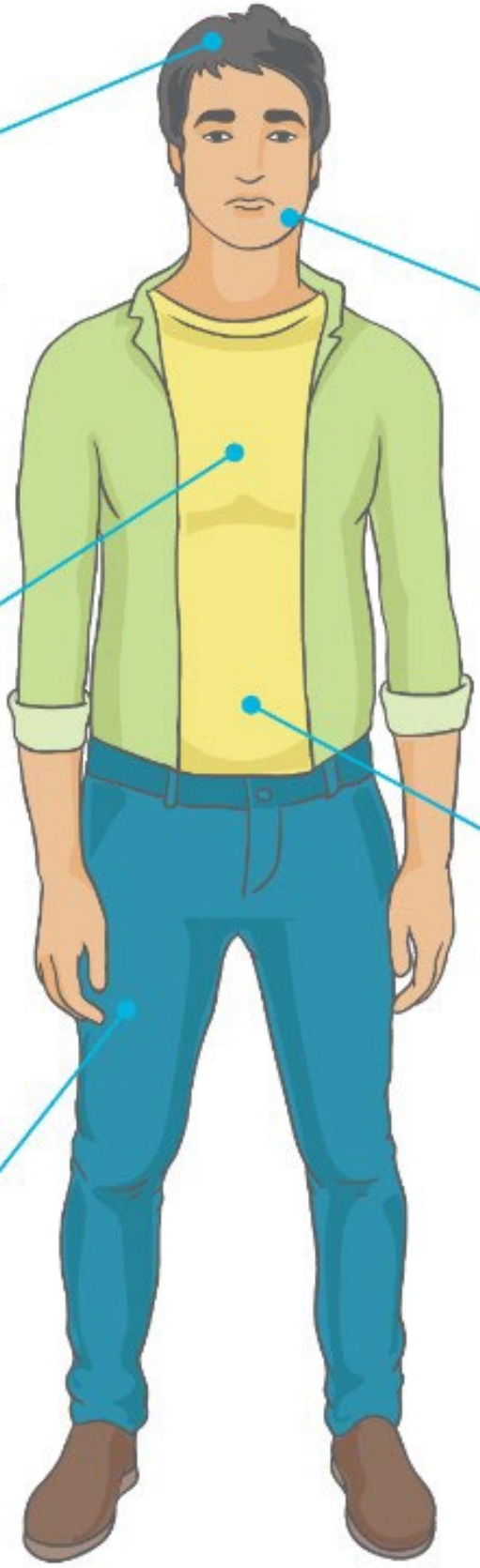
# 5 SIGNS YOUR SLEEP HABITS AREN'T WORKING FOR YOU



## YOUR MIND IS FOGGY

What we experience and learn gets cemented to memory while we sleep. Interference with this process causes:

- Reduced alertness and concentration
- Confusion
- Impaired judgement
- Forgetfulness

## YOU'RE GETTING SICK A LOT

When we don't sleep enough, T-cells go down and inflammation goes up, resulting in:

- Increased vulnerability to viruses and bacteria
- Acute increase in risk of getting sick
- Increased risk of heart disease and other inflammation-related illnesses

## YOUR WORKOUTS FEEL TOO HARD

Our body uses sleep as an opportunity to refresh neurotransmitter levels and remove energy-draining metabolites. Otherwise, we experience:

- Decreased central nervous system activity
- Slower reaction time
- Low energy and endurance capacity
- Depressed mood
- Reduced desire to exercise

## YOU'RE UNHAPPY

While we sleep, we produce fresh neurotransmitters and regulate hormone production. Interference here causes:

- Impaired regulation of emotions
- Heightened stress
- Low mood
- Possible increase in risk of depression

## YOU'RE STRUGGLING WITH YOUR WEIGHT

Poor sleep is linked to excess body fat, as it can:

- Disrupt appetite regulation
- Cause you to feel hungrier
- Lead to increased calorie intake

Also, excess body fat can reduce sleep quality.

**Give your body and mind transition time.** Allow at least 30 minutes (and preferably an hour) in the evening to slowly wind down and prepare for sleep.

**Stick to a routine.** Bodies love routines and consistency. If your body knows what to expect in your day, it'll help you wake up and doze off at the right time.

**You can't control your actual sleep. But you can control your sleep behaviors and environment.** Take charge of your actions and surroundings, be consistent, and enjoy the Z's.

~excerpt from *Hacking Sleep: Engineering a high quality, restful night.* Brian St. Pierre MS, RD. **← Click here for full article.**

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## High Cholesterol – New York State Adults, 2021

More than 1 in 3 Americans have high total blood cholesterol, a condition where the blood contains too many lipids (fats).1 Elevated blood cholesterol levels (greater than 200 mg per dL) are a major modifiable risk factor for cardiovascular disease (CVD), including heart attack and stroke. Lowering elevated blood cholesterol through proven lifestyle changes and/or cholesterol-lowering medications can reduce the risk for CVD. Lifestyle modification activities which include adhering to a heart healthy diet, getting regular exercise, avoiding all tobacco products, maintaining a healthy weight, and consuming alcohol in moderation, if at all, are critical to health promotion and cardiovascular risk reduction.

Blood cholesterol goals are now based on an individual's risk factors for CVD. In addition to high cholesterol, other modifiable risk factors for CVD include uncontrolled hypertension, diabetes, physical inactivity, smoking, being overweight or obese, and drinking alcohol in excess. Non-modifiable risk factors include race and ethnicity, family history of high cholesterol and early onset of CVD, and increased age. **Talk with your health care provider to identify risk factors, get cholesterol levels checked, and develop a personalized plan to lower your risk for CVD.**

### Key Findings from the NYS Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey

- *Over 4.8 million adults in New York State reported being told by a health professional they have high cholesterol levels (36.2%).*

- *The prevalence of high cholesterol among adults with obesity (42.3%) is significantly higher than adults who have neither obesity nor overweight (30.1%).*

- *Adults with diabetes have a significantly higher rate (62.7%) of elevated cholesterol compared to adults without diabetes (32.2%). Adults who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure are more than twice as likely to have high cholesterol as those without high blood pressure (55.5% vs. 26.3%).*

- *High cholesterol is significantly more prevalent among adults living with disability (46.6%) compared to adults without disability (32.9%).*

- *Almost ninety percent of adults reported having their cholesterol checked within the past five years. Rates for having cholesterol checked within the past five years are highest among adults living with diabetes (97.1%), over 65 years of age (97.0%), diagnosed with high blood pressure (96.7%), and enrolled in Medicare (96.0%).*

- *Adults with less than a high school education and adults with annual household income less than $25,000 are less likely to be checked for high cholesterol (82.6% and 86.1%), but more likely to be diagnosed with it (41.5% and 39.7%).*

REMEMBER TO UTILIZE COUNTY WORK BENEFITS THROUGH EAP: HTTP://WWW.THEEAPPREMIUM.COM

- YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE ENROLLED IN COUNTY INSURANCE TO ACCESS EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.
- ONCE LOGGED IN YOU CAN ACCESS RESOURCES SUCH AS THE WELLNESS CENTER, EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND MORE.

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**Don't Let Anxiety Control Your Life:** Anxiety is familiar to everyone due to the many stresses and complexities of modern life, but about 25 percent of U.S. adults have a serious problem with anxiety that must be addressed at some time in their lives.

"Unlike fear, which is usually directed toward a concrete thing or event, such as a snarling dog or not meeting a deadline, anxiety is often nonspecific and can be brought on by worrying about the future, your finances or your health, in general," says Edmund Bourne, Ph.D., author of *Coping With Anxiety*. "Anxiety can appear in different forms and at different levels of intensity, and can range in severity from a mere twinge of uneasiness to a full-blown panic attack."

The causes of anxiety are varied and include upsets in brain chemistry, heredity, childhood trauma, abuse, chronic stress, loss of a loved one, and drug and alcohol abuse, to name a few.

"While it can be helpful to identify possible causes of anxiety and address them, you don't need to know why you feel anxious to be helped by practicing coping strategies," says Dr. Bourne.

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## Coping strategies

The following practices are helpful for anyone with anxiety and may be all that's needed if your anxiety level is mild and not disrupting your life.

People with more severe anxiety, including anyone dealing with panic or post-traumatic stress disorder, will still find the exercises helpful but also may need therapy and medication.

These exercises can be done individually or in any combination:

**Take calming breaths**

This exercise quickly interrupts the momentum of anxiety symptoms. Breathing from your abdomen, inhale through your nose slowly to a count of five. Pause and hold your breath to a count of five. Exhale slowly to a count of five. Take two normal breaths, then repeat the cycle for three to five minutes.

**Stop magnifying problems**

Exaggerating problems by making them seem bigger and more serious than they are can lead to anxiety. To combat this way of thinking, stop using words such as terrible, awful, or horrendous in relation to events or situations in your life. Instead of saying to yourself, "It's unbearable," or "I can't stand it," try saying, "I can cope" and "I can deal with and survive this."

**Stop worrisome thoughts**

Use this strategy if you find yourself stuck in a spiral of worrisome thoughts that won't go away. "If you're alone and want to halt a chain of anxious thoughts, shout in a loud and forceful manner, 'Stop!' or 'Stop it!'" says Dr. Bourne. "If you're with other people, shout internally as you visualize a large stop sign." Every time the worrisome thoughts return, repeat the spoken or internal command to yourself.

**Shift your point of view**

When anxiety or worry about an actual or possible problem is getting the best of you, try thinking about the situation in the following ways:

- Tell yourself you can lighten up about it.
- Say the affirmation, "This too shall pass."
- Realize it's not likely to be as bad as your worst thoughts about it.

**Combat negative self-talk**

Positive affirmations can help you cope with anxiety in the moment and over the long-term by helping you change long-standing beliefs, which tend to enable anxiety. To make your thoughts more constructive and supportive, replace or refute each negative statement.

For example, replace "This is unbearable" with "I can learn to cope with this." Or, replace "What if this goes on without stopping?" with "I'll deal with this one day at a time."

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## Breakfast Casserole

## Ingredients

- **Olive oil spray**
- **1/2 small yellow onion, diced (about 1/2 cup or 3 oz.)**
- **2 large white mushrooms, diced (a little more than 1/2 cup or about 2 oz.)**
- **3 oz. frozen broccoli, thawed and diced (about 1/2 cup)**
- **1 large, precooked chicken sausage (about 3 oz.), diced**
- **5 egg whites, whisked**
- **2 tbsp. low-fat feta cheese**
- **1 green onion, diced**
- **1/8tsp. sea salt**
- **1/8 tsp. black pepper**

## Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Preheat nonstick skillet over high heat for one minute.

Remove from heat, spray with olive oil spray, then return to stove. Add onions, and reduce heat to medium-high.

Cook for 30 seconds, then add mushrooms, and cook for 30 more seconds. Add broccoli and sausage, cook for 30 to 60 seconds more. Let cool slightly.

Spray six portions of a muffin tin with olive oil spray. Stir together egg whites, vegetable and sausage mixture, feta cheese, green onions, sea salt, and black pepper. Pour into six tins.

Bake for 18 to 20 minutes or until casseroles are set.

Resisting or fighting anxiety is likely to make it worse. A more constructive approach is to cultivate an attitude that says, 'OK, here it is again. I can handle this. I've done it before.' In most cases, anxiety peaks and begins to subside in a few minutes. It will pass more quickly if you practice coping strategies regularly when you start to feel anxious.

- *https://www.theeappremium.com/emotional-wellbeing/anxiety-disorders/dont-let-anxiety-control-your-life.html*

**Happy New Year!** It's a great time to focus on healthy eating and physical activity. Not sure how? Here are 5 ways for you to be healthier in the new year:

- **Cut back on added sugars.**
  - Too much sugar can lead to weight gain and obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Reduce your sugar by including more whole foods rather than packaged foods. Also consider drinking water instead of sugary beverages. Learn more about added sugars.
- **Limit salty snacks.**
  - Many people have too much salt in their diet, which can lead to high blood pressure and cause stress on the heart. Learn more about low-salt snacking.
- **Fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables.**
  - Eating more fruits and vegetables can improve your health and reduce your risk of certain diseases. These recipes help increase your daily intake.
- **Make at least half of your grains whole grains.**
  - Whole grains have fiber, that helps with digestion and may assist with weight management. Tips on how to eat more whole grains.
- **Commit to staying active all year long.**
  - If you haven't been active before, you can start with small amounts of time and work up to about 30 minutes a day of moderate activity. Here are some great ideas and exercises you can try at home. ~

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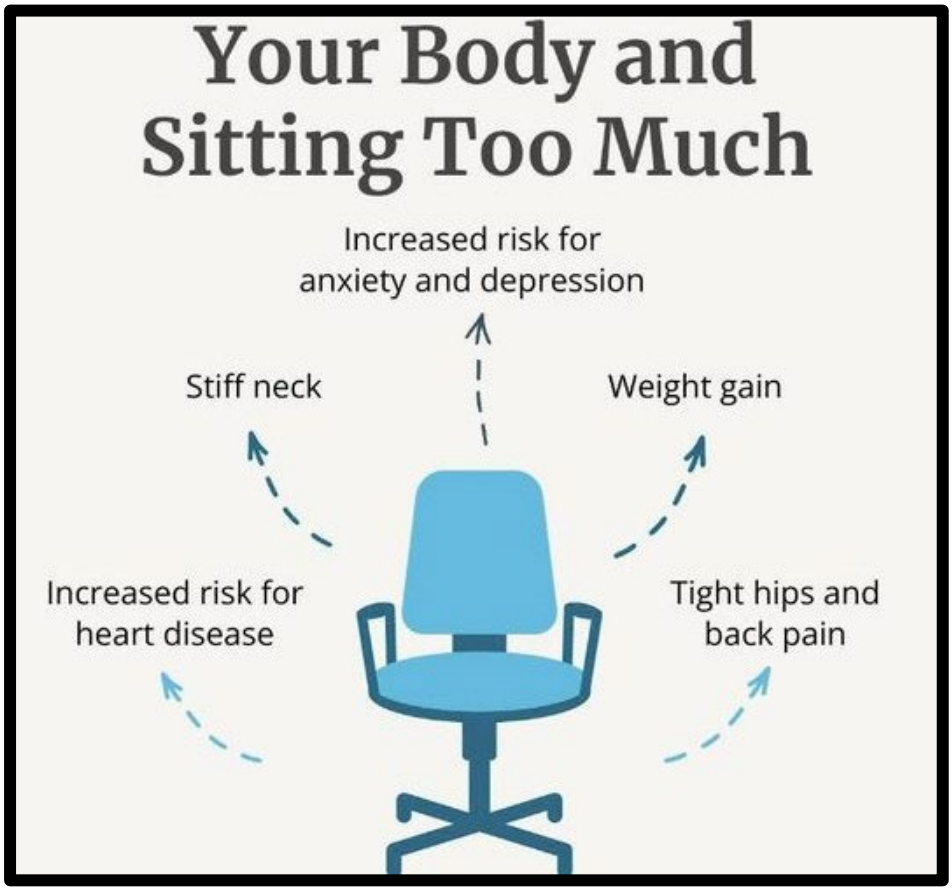
**Stuck at your desk all day?** Sitting too much can raise your risk for a variety of diseases and affect your mental health – but taking short, frequent breaks can help. The human body is built for movement. The ancient Greeks and Romans recognized the importance of physical activity for proper health, and modern medicine has confirmed the links between regular exercise and disease prevention.




But it wasn't until relatively recently that sitting and other sedentary behaviors emerged as threats to public health.

So-called "sitting diseases," which are health issues linked to sitting and inactivity, are now a major area of research. And there's ample evidence that spending too much of your time motionless — even if you exercise regularly — raises your risks for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and premature death, according to an editorial published in 2022 in BMJ. There is also evidence that it raises your risk for mental health conditions such as depression, according to a cohort study published in January 2023 in the Journal of Affective Disorders.

The theory here is straightforward. Your body is built for movement, and spending too much time not moving can cause a wide range of negative health effects. That seems to be true even if you're exercising regularly.

The exact relationship between sedentary behaviors and mental health problems such as anxiety and depression also remains unclear. But there is a strong relationship between mental and physical health, according to a study published in 2019 in Perspectives in Psychiatric Care. If sitting is bad for the body, it makes sense that it could also negatively affect a person's mind.

Modern life makes it pretty easy to spend most of the day sitting down. But the latest research, not to mention common sense, suggests that our bodies weren't designed for so much inactivity.

While it took some time for medical scientists to catch up to our changing patterns of behavior, it seems clear that sitting and other sedentary pursuits are a risk to our health. Fortunately, the antidote to this seems fairly simple and painless: **Break up long stretches of sitting with frequent movement breaks.** For the full article *"Is Too Much Sitting Bad for Your Health?"* click here.

## Wellness Myths and Facts

**Myth:** There is A One Size Fits All Approach to Wellness.

**Fact:** Social media posts do not reflect the amount of time, self-reflection, effort, and failure that go into any particular person's pursuit of wellness. Social media is meant to be curated, which means we can all see what someone else is doing for their own personal wellness, and we might think that should work for us, too. It might, but it might not. There could be many other variables at play for you. Just because someone is a dietitian or trainer on social doesn't mean they're YOUR dietitian or trainer. We all have different bodies and minds, and therefore we have different needs, challenges, and paths.

**Myth:** Mental Health Issues Can't Affect Me.

**Fact:** Mental health issues can affect anyone. According to SAMHSA, 1 in 5 American adults experienced a mental health condition in a given year. 1 in 20 Americans have lived with a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

**Myth:** You Can Catch Up on Your Sleep

**Fact:** Many people think they can sleep five hours a night during the workweek and "catch up" by getting 10 hours of sleep on the weekend. Not true. Ideally, sleep should happen regularly at the same time every night. Average adult needs about seven to eight hours of sleep. It's okay to have a late night and sleep in every now and then, but you're not "catching up" on your sleep. If you're having issues with sleep, please reach out to your doctor.

*Send your questions to healthinfo@alleganyco.gov*

## Wellness Newsletter Quiz

1. **Getting a healthy tan** is a good way to avoid skin cancer - **True or False?**

2. **Which of the following are risk factors** for depression in adults?
   a. Health/Financial Problems
   b. Difficulty Handling Stress
   c. Family History of Depression
   d. All of the Above

3. **How many teaspoons of sugar** does the average American eat per day?
   a. Five
   b. Seven
   c. 15
   d. 20

4. **Which of these health conditions** is not a risk factor for heart disease?
   a. Elevated Blood Sugar
   b. Less than 6 hours of Sleep per night
   c. Poor Eyesight
   d. Lack of Exercise
   e. High Cholesterol

5. **Decreasing stress** can improve your physical health – **True or False?**

*Answers: 1. False; 2. D; 3. D; 4. C; 5. True*