

AHA Adds Sleep to

Checklist

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The importance of sleep for health cannot be overstated. In this active state of unconsciousness, the body can restore and rejuvenate itself, preparing for the demands of another day.

Key takeaways:

- The American Heart Association has revised and updated its checklist for cardiovascular health to include sleep.
- Following the results of hundreds of research papers, the AHA now recommends that adults get 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.
- A lack of sleep can lead to multiple health problems, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure. These factors increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- Getting enough deep and restorative sleep is essential for good overall and cardiovascular health.

People who get less than the recommended 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night are at increased risk for developing chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, and heart disease. Sleep is so critical for heart health that the American Heart Association (AHA) has added it to its cardiovascular health checklist.

The AHA checklist includes various health and lifestyle factors that can impact heart health and cardiovascular disease risk. Now, in addition to items like maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, and not smoking, the AHA is also urging people to get enough sleep.

Continue reading as we explore the importance of sleep for cardiovascular health.

Why is cardiovascular health important?

Cardiovascular or heart disease is an umbrella term for conditions affecting the heart or blood vessels. It's often linked to a build-up of fatty deposits inside the arteries (atherosclerosis), high blood pressure, and an increased risk of blood clots. Because it can affect arteries anywhere in the body, it can damage the brain, heart, kidneys, and eyes.

Although it's largely preventable, heart disease is the [leading cause of death](#) in the United States, killing someone every 34 seconds.

Because the cardiovascular disease can be deadly, it's critical to take steps to protect heart health. However, although [80% of all cardiovascular events](#) could be prevented by a healthy lifestyle and proper management of known cardiovascular risk factors, many people still don't take action.

What is the AHA checklist?

The AHA publishes guidelines and recommendations for heart health based on the latest scientific evidence. These guidelines are designed to help people reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease and improve the overall quality of care for people already diagnosed with heart conditions.

Previously, the AHA used a tool called Life's Simple 7. **This tool assessed seven factors that impact heart health:**

- Smoking status.
- Physical activity.
- Weight.
- Diet.
- Blood sugar.
- Cholesterol.
- Blood pressure.

The idea behind the tool was to shift from focusing on heart disease treatment to emphasizing disease prevention and health promotion.

As research evolved, it provided further insights into the strengths and limitations of the approach, and in response, the AHA evaluated the original guidelines. It then released an updated version of the checklist called Life's Essential 8 earlier this year.

The algorithms of Life's Essential 8 contain the original seven factors with some updates, and sleep is a new addition. In addition, each metric now has a scoring algorithm from 0 to 100 points, which allows you to generate a heart score.

The new sleep metric suggests 7 to 9 hours of sleep daily for adults, but children require more.

Why has sleep been added to the checklist?

Sleep is essential for life, and human biology depends on it. Although experts are still unsure of all the ways sleep impacts health, they know its functions affect nearly every physiological system. As a result, a growing body of evidence links insufficient or low-quality sleep to an [increased risk](#) of cardiovascular disease.

The new sleep duration metric reflects research findings that sleep impacts overall health. People with healthier sleep patterns can manage factors such as weight and blood pressure that affect their risk of heart problems.

The AHA spent over 12 years reviewing more than 2,400 scientific studies on the topic before refining the metrics, which can now be used for anyone ages 2 and above.

The new recommendations for sleep are 7 to 9 hours daily for adults, 10 to 16 hours for children under 5, 9 to 12 hours for ages 6 to 12 years, and 8 to 10 hours for teenagers 13 to 18 years.

However, although research often focuses on sleep duration, quality sleep involves many metrics, including duration, timing, regularity, and efficiency. Sleeping for too long or too little can affect heart health and increase the risk of poor health.

How else does lack of sleep affect heart health?

People who get less than 7 hours of sleep each night are [more likely to experience health problems](#), some of which increase the risk of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke.

These health problems include:

High blood pressure: Blood pressure refers to the force of blood pushing against the walls of the arteries as the heart pumps it around the body. If this pressure gets too high, it can narrow or rupture blood vessels or cause them to leak. It can also cause blood clots to form in the arteries leading to the brain, increasing the risk of stroke. However, as you sleep, your blood pressure drops. If you don't get enough sleep, this temporarily doesn't happen, meaning the body suffers the effects of high blood pressure for longer.

Type 2 diabetes: Diabetes causes sugar to build up in your blood, damaging the blood vessels. Getting enough quality sleep can help improve blood sugar control and reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Obesity: People who are sleep deficient are more likely to be obese. Without enough sleep, your body produces more of the hormone ghrelin, which increases appetite, and decreases the hormone leptin, which tells you when you're full. You may then overeat and gain weight. Carrying excess weight can cause fatty material to build up in the arteries, increasing the risk of heart attacks.

The AHA produces guidelines outlining the risk factors of cardiovascular disease. Its checklist, Life's Essential 8, includes the new metric of sleep duration, reflecting research findings that sleep impacts overall and heart health.

Lack of sleep can cause health problems that increase the risk of heart disease, heart attack, and stroke. Therefore, getting enough quality sleep is critical.

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