



Healthy Aging in Neighborhoods of Diversity across the Life Span

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The Healthy Journey

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES • NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH • NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON AGING

Improving sleep quality

Sleep statistics

People need different amounts of sleep as they age. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend 12-16 hours of sleep for infants, 8-10 hours of sleep for teens, and 7-9 hours of sleep for adults. About one-third of adults in the U.S. report sleeping less than the recommended amount. Between 50 to 70 million adults in the U.S. have a sleep disorder. Many sleep disorders are underreported, and many people go untreated.

Sleep is crucial to your health. Lack of sleep is linked to many chronic diseases, including heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Lack of sleep also affects mood, memory, immune function, and metabolism. Too little sleep makes it difficult to stay alert, which is a risk for accidents and falls. Symptoms of poor sleep quality include not feeling rested upon waking, difficulty breathing, tossing and turning, and waking up frequently throughout the night.

What is circadian rhythm?

Circadian rhythm is the brain's 24-hour internal clock that regulates cycles of alertness and sleepiness. It is affected by changes in light exposure. Travelers and night shift workers may find it difficult to maintain a regular sleep or wake schedule. This can lead to a disrupted circadian rhythm, making it harder to get quality sleep. Tips to regulate your body's circadian rhythm include a regular sleep schedule, physical activity, and morning exposure to sunlight.

Types of sleep disorders

There are many types of sleep disorders. If you struggle with sleep, it is important to talk to your medical provider. Your provider can give you a diagnosis and treatment plan that meets your needs. Insomnia, sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome (RLS), and narcolepsy are types of sleep disorders.



Image from sleepfoundation.org

- **Insomnia** is the most common sleep disorder. Symptoms include difficulty falling and staying asleep, excessive sleepiness during the day.
- **Sleep apnea** is a breathing disorder. Symptoms include heavy snoring, gasping for air, periods when breathing does not occur, shortness of breath, dry mouth, and morning headaches. Obstructive sleep apnea happens when your airway is blocked during sleep. It is the most common form of sleep apnea. Another type, central sleep apnea, happens when your brain signals your breathing to stop while you are sleeping.
- Symptoms of **restless legs syndrome (RLS)** include uncomfortable sensations in the leg like itching, crawling, or pulling. These feelings can occur anywhere between the thigh and ankle, but most commonly occur in the calf. Moving the leg can relieve discomfort.
- Symptoms of **narcolepsy** include extreme daytime sleepiness and falling asleep suddenly during the day. These symptoms happen even when you get enough sleep at night.

If you have symptoms, schedule an appointment with your healthcare provider. To learn more about sleep dis-

Contents

Improving sleep quality	1
HANDLSleep	2
Flu shot reminder	2
COVID-19 updated booster shots	3
Free COVID-19 test kits	3

orders, visit https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/key_disorders.html.

Behavioral interventions & treatments

Sleep quality can be improved with some healthy behaviors. Try these tips to improve your sleep:

- Avoid bright artificial lights around bedtime.
- Use earplugs, a white noise machine, or fan to drown out noise.
- Reduce screen time 1 hour before bed by turning off the TV or putting your phone away.
- Keep a sleep schedule. Try to go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- Keep a worry journal by your bed and jot down worries that are keeping you awake.
- Create a relaxing bedtime ritual (e.g., reading, journaling, meditation). UCLA's Mindful Research Center has free meditation recordings at <https://www.uclahealth.org/programs/marc/free-guided-meditations/guided-meditations>. Visit the site to listen to a body scan meditation for sleep.
- Avoid caffeine after 2PM. Caffeine is a stimulant that can make it harder to fall sleep.
- Keep your bedroom cool and comfortable. Ways to keep the temperature comfortable include running a fan, using breathable sheets and pajamas, or setting your thermostat between 60-68°F.
- Avoid drinking large amounts of fluid before bed to avoid waking up to use the restroom.
- Give yourself 3 hours to digest your dinner before bedtime. Eating meals close to bedtime can cause uncomfortable indigestion or acid reflux.
- Regular physical activity improves sleep quality and helps maintain a healthy weight. Excess weight can lead to or worsen obstructive sleep apnea.
- Add sunlight to your morning routine. Try spending 15 minutes exposed to natural sunlight when you wake up. Ways to do this include going for a morning walk, drinking your morning tea or coffee outside, open window coverings to let morning sunlight into your home.
- Avoid taking long naps during the day.

See a medical provider to discuss treatments and medications that could improve your sleep quality. Some treatments include medication, devices, and psychotherapy. A provider will recommend which treatment is appropriate for your symptoms or diagnosis.

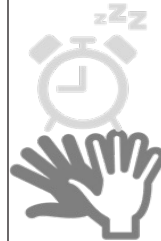
Medication: Some commonly prescribed medications for sleep include Ambien and Trazodone. Please follow your provider's instructions and only take medications as prescribed. Many medications used to treat other conditions may cause side effects like drowsiness. These

medications should not be used to treat a sleep disorder unless they are recommended by your provider.

Over the Counter (OTC): Your medical provider may suggest OTC treatments to address your sleep. Melatonin is an example of a sleep supplement that can be purchased at a drugstore without a prescription. Please talk to your medical provider to see if OTC treatments are right for you. If so, be sure to ask your provider about type, dosage, and frequency. These treatments are not intended to be used long-term.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP): A CPAP is a device commonly used by people with obstructive sleep apnea. The machine is connected to a hose and mask that you wear as you sleep. It helps you breathe by delivering constant air pressure. Your health-care provider will help you find a CPAP machine that fits you comfortably and meets your needs. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions to keep your CPAP clean. CPAP machines are often covered by health insurance if your provider prescribed one to you for sleep apnea treatment.

Psychotherapy: Stress, anxiety, and depression are linked to disrupted sleep. These conditions may cause you to sleep too much or too little. Your provider may suggest therapy as an alternative to using sleep medication. One type of therapy used to treat sleep disorders is called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I). Cognitive behavioral therapy addresses thoughts, habits, and patterns that keep you from getting enough sleep. This treatment also provides sleep education and relaxation tools.



HANDLSleep

HANDLS is partnering with researchers from Clemson University, Westat, and Pennsylvania State University in a research study on how sleep affects health and well-being. We invite you to participate in this study. If you agree to participate, once a year over the next 4 years, you will be asked to:

- Wear an actigraphy watch for 7 days to measure your sleep.
- Complete 4 brief surveys about your memory, attention, thinking, feelings and experiences each day for 7 days.
- Meet with a trained staff member through videoconferencing to complete an evaluation of your functioning on tasks of memory, attention, processing speed, language, and decision making as well as surveys of physical health and well-being.

- Meet with a phlebotomist at your home who will take a blood sample that will be tested for inflammation, an important marker related to health and aging.

Participants can earn up to \$500 for the completion of this study over the next 4 years. If you are interested in participating, please contact 410-929-6597.

Flu shot reminder



Millions of Americans get the flu each year. The flu is a respiratory illness caused by a virus. It spreads easily. Flu symptoms are coughing, sore throat, runny nose, fever, body aches, and fatigue. You can prevent the flu by:

- Getting a flu shot
- Washing your hands often
- Staying away from people who are sick

Pharmacies and grocery stores offer flu shots. Your healthcare provider can give you a flu shot in their office. You can also visit <https://www.vaccines.gov/> or call 1-800-232-0233 to find flu shot locations in your zip code. If you don't have health insurance, you can call 311 to review your flu shot options in Baltimore City.

COVID-19 updated booster shots

Vaccines reduce the risk of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from a virus. A booster shot is an extra vaccine dose. This extra dose helps your body fight infection by increasing your protection against a virus.

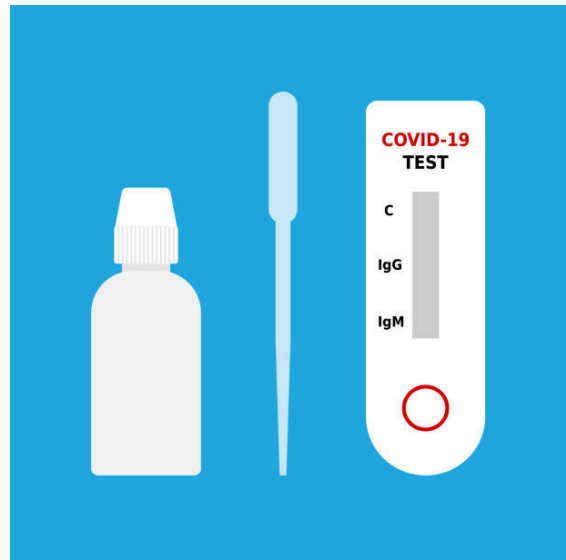
COVID-19 cases are on the rise. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a new round of booster shots in September. The booster shots are updated versions of Moderna and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines. They protect against COVID-19 strains and variants such as BA.2.86 and XBB.1.5. To learn more about the updated COVID-19 booster shot, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/stay-up-to-date.html>.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends booster shots for everyone ages 5 and older. It is especially important to get a booster shot if you are considered high risk. If you are over the age of 65, have a weakened immune system, or have medical conditions such as cancer, lung disease or diabetes, you are considered high risk.

You can schedule a booster shot the same way you scheduled your last COVID-19 vaccine. You can register for your primary series or new booster shot of the

COVID-19 vaccine by visiting <https://covax.baltimore-city.gov/en-US/> or calling 443-984-8650. Bring your COVID-19 vaccination card to your booster shot appointment. You may get a COVID-19 booster and flu shot on the same day.

Adults without health insurance can get a free COVID-19 vaccination through the Bridge Access Program. To learn more, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/bridge/index.html>. To find out where you can get a vaccine in your area through this program, visit <https://www.vaccines.gov/>.



Free COVID-19 test kits

Did you know that each household in the country can receive 4 at-home COVID-19 tests? These tests are shipped directly to your home. There is no shipping charge, and the test kits are completely free. The kits include instructions so you can easily take the tests from home. To place an order, visit <https://www.covid.gov/tests> or call 1-800-232-0233.



Contacting HANDLS

If you'd like to be added to the HANDLS email list, please message us at handls@mail.nih.gov.

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Newsletter for the HANDLS community

The purpose of this study is to learn about changes in health over time. Using our medical research vehicles, we want to study as many people with different backgrounds as we can. We want this study to help us understand healthy aging by examining the influences of different backgrounds on changes in health over time. The information we gather will help improve health and prevent disabilities. Our goal is to gather information to improve health and prevent disabilities for people of all backgrounds, particularly in minority communities and communities with limited resources.

For information about our study call 877-677-9538 or visit our website <https://handls.nih.gov>.