

5 Ways Sleeping Well Will Protect Your Heart

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia most likely suffered a heart attack while sleeping, which caused his heart to stop beating, says noted cardiologist Dr. Chauncey Crandall.

“He probably was just feeling poorly but didn’t recognize what was happening, so he went to sleep,” says Dr. Crandall, chief of the cardiac transplant program at the world-renowned Palm Beach Cardiovascular Clinic in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

But experts warn that sometimes poor sleep is often the culprit itself, increasing the risk of heart disease.

“Sleep is something all human beings do—most not very well,” says Johns Hopkins neurologist and sleep expert Dr. Rachel Salas. When you don’t get enough good-quality sleep, whether because of an untreated sleep disorder or simply not getting enough shut-eye, you raise your odds of developing many conditions that can lead to heart disease.

A recent British study linked lack of sleep to diabetes and heart disease and a 12 percent increase in death. People who sleep less than six hours nightly—and that’s more than one in three Americans between 40 and 90 years of age—are more likely to die prematurely than people who sleep for six to eight hours.

Dr. Craig Title, an obesity expert from New York City, tells *Newsmax Health* that sleep deprivation disrupts the balance between the crucial hormones leptin and ghrelin which regulate the appetite.

“When you are sleep deprived there is an increase in ghrelin, a hormone that signals the brain you are hungry and a decrease in leptin that tells your brain you are full,” he explains.

“Therefore you tend to eat more so what we see is more fat storage and decreased insulin sensitivity which can lead to obesity, diabetes and heart disease.”

Lack of sleep also triggers your body’s stress response, says Dr. Title, which leads to increased cortisol levels that also cause fat storage and organ damage.

Dr. Helen Emsellem, of the Center for Sleep Disorders in Chevy Chase, M.D., tells Newsmax Health that sleep is restorative for both body and mind.

“There is a natural purpose for sleep that if disrupted can wreak havoc with your health,” she says. “Numerous studies have shown that too little sleep increases blood pressure which can lead to heart disease and stroke.”

Dr. Emsellem recommends keeping a sleep log and taking care of issues—such as snoring—that can disrupt your sleep pattern.

“Make sure you also get a metabolic testing to rule out medical issues that may be causing your sleeplessness.”

Here are other ways to help:

- **Keep a consistent bed time.** Try to go to bed and wake up at approximately the same time every day. Make going to bed a pleasant ritual, perhaps by taking a lavender-scented bath or reading an inspirational passage.
- **Keep electronics out of the bedroom.** Avoid having a TV or computer in the bedroom or using an e-reader 30 minutes before you turn in. Prayer and meditation can also help you sleep more peacefully.
- **Avoid a nightcap.** It’s a myth that alcohol can help you sleep better. In fact, it can upset your sleep cycle so that you may awaken in the middle of the night. Too much daytime caffeine can have a similar effect. Try drinking chamomile tea in the evening to help you sleep soundly.
- **Exercise.** Daily exercise has been proven to help you get

a good night's sleep. Even a 30-minute walk in the fresh air is beneficial for good Z's.

- **Check your medications.** Often medicine like beta blockers can impact your sleep. Ask your health care provider for the best time to take your meds.

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