

- Heart diseases

Sleep a new risk factor for heart disease

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Adequate sleep, both in terms of duration and quality, is proving to be essential for heart health. The relationship may be a complicated one though. Excess sleep of more than nine hours is harmful, and can reasonably make the body sluggish and vulnerable.



But those sleeping less than seven hours a day on average have been found to have a higher frequency of heart disease. The healthy sleep duration therefore seems to be between seven and eight hours. And early risers fare somewhat better than late ones.

The quality of sleep also seems to clearly matter: those with sleep apnea (orthostatic sleep apnea), snoring problems, sleeping disorders such as difficulty in falling asleep or waking up frequently at night, suffer more frequently from heart ailments. Which then are the types of heart ailments associated with unhealthy sleep? Heart attack rates are clearly up, as are rates of high heart failures and coronary artery disease.

Experts attribute the increased cardiac risk to higher blood pressure levels and increased levels of certain circulating hormones during the night, in those with sleeping problems.

Cardiac disease is the largest killer in urban India today, and doctors as well as patients are familiar with the seven conventional risk factors: tobacco, high BP, high cholesterol, Diabetes, strong family history, lack of exercise and obesity. Sleep is on the threshold of joining in as the eighth risk factor for cardiac diseases.

Interestingly, some of the risk factors are intricately interrelated, and may not be so difficult to handle.

Adequate physical exercise, for example, could additionally solve the problem of overweight as well as lack of sleep, apart from being protective to the heart.

What then prevents you from catching seven hours of good sleep every night? Late night parties, television or late hours at work? Sleep therapists strongly advise an early light dinner, and switching off all electronic devices (TV and mobile phone) at least an hour before sleeping time. It could be worth following their advice to protect your heart!