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Avoid sleeping in – even on the weekends. GETTY IMAGES

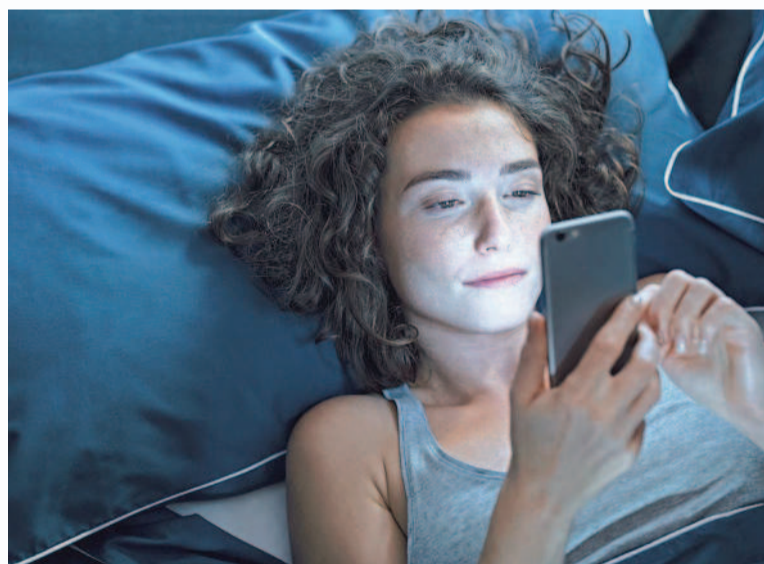


Good night for a good day

A better sleep routine can impact your mental and physical health

Angie Ferguson Guest Columnist | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

It is well established that a good night's sleep is a foundation for maintaining good health and a positive frame of mind. Sleeping well has a direct impact on our mental and physical health, including our energy levels, productivity, emotional balance, immune system and weight.



Night time light exposure has the opposite effect, as it can trick your brain into thinking it's still daytime. The blue light that is emitted from electronic devices like your smartphone, laptop and TV that are the worst culprits. GETTY IMAGES

Research shows that poor sleep has immediate negative effects on your hormones, exercise performance and brain function. In contrast, a good night's sleep can boost your immune system, improve your energy levels, increase athletic performance and lift your overall mood.

Sleep can often be an overlooked aspect of a training program. When it comes to optimizing recovery, we typically jump straight to thinking about post workout nutrition, massage, compression and hydrotherapy. While these are all great tools, sleep should always be prioritized as the most important tool for recovery.

Getting in sync with your bodies circadian rhythm is one of the best ways you can improve your sleep. If you keep a regular sleep-wake schedule, your body will get accustomed to a healthy sleep routine, leaving you feeling much more refreshed and energized.

- Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Avoid sleeping in – even on the weekends.
- Be mindful of napping – if you have trouble falling asleep at night, napping can make it worse.
- Make sleep a priority – work out what time you need to wake up and work backwards to identify your bedtime.

To be even more effective, control your exposure to light – including your phone and TV.

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Embrace connections, beat loneliness this Valentine's Day

Rachel Byrd
Guest Columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

The rise in red hearts, teddy bears and boxed chocolates on display at retail stores can only mean one thing – Valentine's Day is approaching.

Although Valentine's Day is a universally recognized day of love, not everyone looks forward to Feb. 14. Those who have lost a life partner can experience a

rollercoaster of emotions on the "Hallmark Holiday." This is especially true for widowed seniors, many of whom experience isolation and a lack of companionship on a regular basis, let alone a day when love is supposed to be the air.

Many senior living communities offer activities that are geared for supporting seniors during holidays such as Valentine's Day. Additionally, seniors who live at home can take matters into their own hands by purposefully planning ac-

tivities that will help minimize feelings of sadness or loneliness. These four activities offer a great opportunity for seniors to surround themselves in positivity and friendship on Valentine's Day:

Reflect: Get together with a group of friends whose significant others have also passed away. Meet over lunch or dinner, bring out old photo albums and reflect on past moments with your spouse, such as weddings, vacations and even your most memorable Valen-

tine's Day. Oftentimes, reminiscing about our favorite memories helps us to feel closer to that person.

Quality time: Take time to connect with family members, such as children, grandchildren and siblings. Set up a FaceTime or phone call to catch up on life, or even invite a family member or close friend to lunch or a cup of coffee. Connecting with family members pro-

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High blood pressure increases odds for stroke, heart disease

Bryant Stamford

Special to Louisville Courier Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, is a vicious and smart adversary. It's vicious because it greatly increases the odds of heart disease and stroke, some of the leading causes of death in the U.S. And it's smart because it never reveals itself with symptoms.

In fact, most people are completely unaware of the dangers associated with high blood pressure, the so-called "silent killer." Your blood pressure may, at times, go up for a variety of reasons. The problem is when it stays high, it damages the blood vessels.

What is considered high blood pressure?

When is the pressure too high? The answer depends on your point of view. If preventive medicine is important to you, and it should be, the goal would be a blood pressure no greater than 120/80. Unfortunately, this level is often seen as too strict, and unreasonable, and we allow blood pressures that are much higher to prevail.

The latest statistics suggest that nearly half of Americans have hypertension with a systolic pressure greater than 130 or a diastolic pressure greater than 80. This is referred to as Stage 1 Hypertension. Stage 2 is 140 or greater over 90 or greater.

Unfortunately, oftentimes the problem is not considered to be serious until blood pressure reaches Stage 2. Stop and think about this for a moment. If healthy blood pressure is no higher than 120/80, but blood pressure is not viewed as a problem until it hits at least 140/90, consider all the damage that is being done before any intervention.

What causes high blood pressure?

Many factors are responsible for our high incidence of uncontrolled hypertension. Here are three examples. First is poor patient compliance. According to the World Health Organization, the majority (50%-70%) of patients do not take their medication as prescribed.

Second, controlling blood pressure is complicated. It's like a three-headed monster, any of which may be causing the problem. There is a pump (the heart), tubing (the ves-



A person's blood pressure may, at times, go up for a variety of reasons. The problem is when it stays high, it damages the blood vessels. GETTY IMAGES

sels) and fluid (the blood), and each can be the culprit causing hypertension.

If the heart is pumping too strongly or too rapidly, pressure increases. If the pump is not the problem, perhaps the vessels do not dilate or constrict appropriately (getting larger or smaller) when necessary. Pressure can also increase because there is too much fluid in the system.

Your doctor probably cannot determine initially which factor is the problem, so perhaps a diuretic is prescribed to reduce fluid volume. If that doesn't work, then maybe a beta blocker is used to reduce heart activity, or a vasodilator to control the diameter of vessels. The point is, your doctor needs accurate feedback from you, the patient, to get it right.

This brings us to the third factor. Poor communication between doctor and patient is typical as patients often tell doctors what they think they want to hear, and not what is going on. This is silly and harmful because good communication is critical to success in the fight against hypertension. That's why I

strongly advise forming a partnership with your doctor and viewing the situation as an ongoing challenge. It's important to understand that the situation may take time, plus some trial and error to get it right.

How can you prevent high blood pressure?

Our medical model is based on symptoms, and certainly, that seems reasonable. Go see your doctor when you have symptoms that something is wrong and requires treatment. The problem is the misinterpretation on the flip side. If, as is the case with hypertension, there are no symptoms, there is no problem. When this misinterpretation is combined with a limited understanding of the situation, it's easy to see how things can go wrong.

I recall observing a situation that underscores the problem. A doctor was taking the blood pressure of a man I'll call Fred who came to our lab at the University of Louisville. It was part of a screening process to ensure that he could participate safely in our community exercise

program. Fred was middle-aged with some excess belly fat, but other than that he appeared to be healthy.

I could tell by the look on the doctor's face that he was surprised, then alarmed. And for good reason. I later learned that Fred's blood pressure was sky-high! The blood pressure cuff was removed, and the doctor put on his "most concerned look" as he addressed Fred.

Doctor: "Are you aware that your blood pressure is quite high?"

Fred: "Really? I'm surprised because I took some meds to bring it down."

Doctor: "I'm sorry, does that mean you quit taking the medication?"

Fred: "Yeah, I figured if it worked, why keep taking it?"

Doctor: "How long ago was that?"

Fred: "Hmm, maybe three, four years. Guess it came back, huh?"

Healthy diet, exercise can help

Despite the many challenges and the fact that far too many Americans will suffer the consequences of high blood pressure, things are much better than they used to be. In the old days, before the initiation of the Framingham Heart Study in 1948, a type of epidemiological study that follows a group of individuals over time to determine the natural history of certain diseases, doctors viewed a progressively increasing blood pressure with age as normal and natural, and they called it Benign Essential Hypertension. They assumed blood pressure had to go up to generate more pressure to force blood through narrowing arteries clogged from atherosclerosis, which also was assumed to be natural.

At the time, a normal systolic blood pressure was determined by adding your age to 100. Thus, a 60-year-old would be assumed to be perfectly normal with a very high, health-destroying systolic blood pressure of 160. Compare this with what we now know is a healthy systolic blood pressure of 120 or lower.

I'll end with a plug for healthy diets, lots of exercise, and managing your weight as the best things you can do for your blood pressure. But short of that, make sure you are at the least working closely with your doctor, and if necessary, taking your meds regularly and as prescribed.

Reach Bryant Stamford, a professor of kinesiology and integrative physiology at Hanover College, at stamford@hanover.edu.

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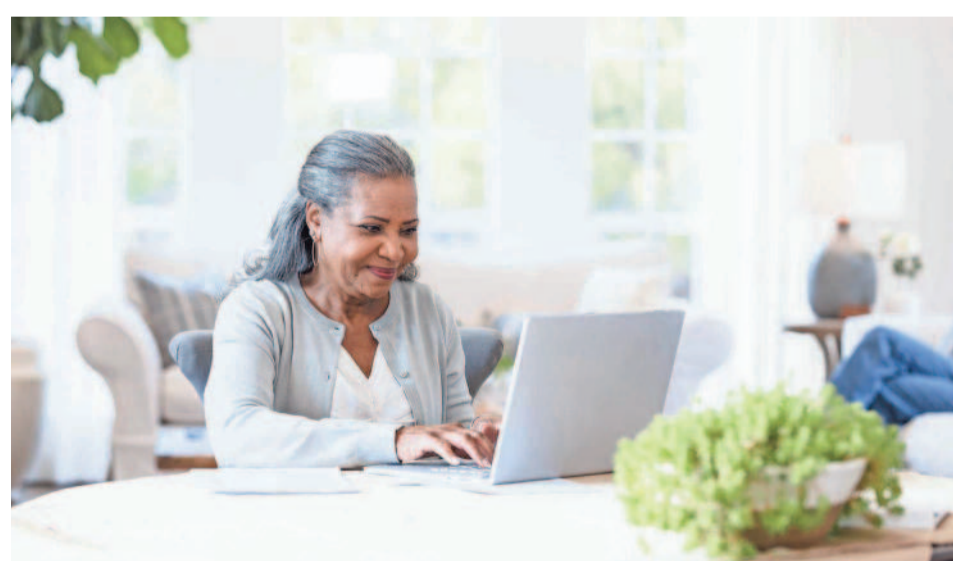
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Take time to connect with family members, such as children, grandchildren and siblings, either in person or online. GETTY IMAGES

Valentine

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vides happiness and love to all parties.

Platonic love: Love and affection from friends is just as important as the romantic kind. For seniors aging at home, organizing a day with close friends provides opportunities to maintain healthy relationships. Exchange Valentine's Day cards and complete an activity together, like watching a movie, cooking a meal or playing a game of cards. Quality time with those who make you laugh can bring a ray of joy to your day.

Local events: Seek out Valentine's Day events happening near you. Senior living communities often host parties and events to celebrate the holiday. Those living at home can check the local

library, YMCA or church for Valentine's Day themed events, such as trivia nights, movie screenings and speed-friending.

Celebrating Valentine's Day without your life partner is understandably challenging. That's why it's important to be intentional in surrounding yourself with the love and friendship of those in your inner circle. One of the best ways to combat loneliness is through socialization. Reconnecting with old acquaintances and meeting new friends offer great opportunities to stay active, upbeat and engaged on Valentine's Day or any other day of the year.

Rachel Byrd is the Regional Manager of Florida Senior Consulting in Lee/Collier County and is licensed as a Certified Dementia Practitioner, a BC-AAP with the Activity Professionals National Credentialing Center and CORE certified as an assisted living administrator.