

Top health tips sleep medicine physicians want you to know

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Getting enough sleep is foundational to good overall health. It helps us get sick less often, maintain a healthy weight and avoid developing chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke. It can even help us dodge car crashes and other accidents.

Still, millions of Americans are chronically short on sleep. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found that more than one-third of U.S. adults don't get enough of it.

Here is a list from the AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know™ series—which provides physicians with a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today's health care headlines—on some important health tips that sleep medicine physicians want their patients to know.

1 Snoring itself isn't a problem, but it can signal trouble

Snoring is a big concern for many patients because it can cause disruptions in sleep patterns, create tension in relationships and affect your bed partner's ability to function the next day. Understanding the causes and consequences and knowing when it's more than just snoring can make all the difference.

About 25–50% of adults snore regularly, according to a *JAMA Otolaryngology—Head & Neck Surgery* Patient Page. Meanwhile, 90 million Americans report snoring at one time or another, while 37 million of those adults report snoring regularly. Meanwhile, people who are overweight, men who are middle-aged or older, and postmenopausal women are more likely to snore.

Virginia Skiba, MD, a neurologist and sleep medicine physician at Henry Ford Medical Center in Sterling Heights, Michigan, shared what doctors want patients to know about snoring. Henry Ford Health is a member of the [AMA Health System Program](#), which provides enterprise solutions to equip leadership, physicians and care teams with resources to help drive the future of medicine.

2 To understand sleep apnea, look beyond symptoms

About 30 million people in the U.S. have sleep apnea, but only 6 million are diagnosed with the condition. This hasn't improved with the pandemic either, with many people experiencing less sleep because of altered life and work routines as well as higher stress levels. And with long COVID further exacerbating underlying conditions such as obstructive sleep apnea, it is important for patients to understand what is at stake. Two AMA members laid out the most important things to know about obstructive sleep apnea.

3 Tackling insomnia begins with knowing which type you have

The anxiety and stress surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to insomnia—the inability to fall asleep or stay asleep. While insomnia was a problem before COVID-19, more people have since been fighting a loss of sleep and are unsure of what to do about it.

Nearly 60% of Americans struggled with sleep during the pandemic, according to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. This lack of sleep led to insomnia, which is a common sleep complaint. About one-third of adults experience acute insomnia, which means they have bouts of sleep loss that last a few days at a time.

But one in 10 suffer from chronic insomnia, which lasts for more than three nights a week for three or more months. Chronic insomnia can lead to increased risk of depression, anxiety, substance abuse and motor vehicle accidents. Over time, this lack of sleep can contribute to health problems such as type 2 diabetes and hypertension. Two physicians gave insights into both acute and chronic insomnia, which together affect some 25–30 million Americans.

4 A good night's sleep depends on a bunch of factors

From family responsibilities and work stress to illnesses, there are many factors that can interfere with a good night's sleep. And when poor sleep happens, it can have immediate negative effects on a person's overall health and well-being, increasing the propensity for obesity, heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

That is why a good night's sleep is just as important as physical activity and healthy eating. Yet it can be hard to pinpoint what steps to take to improve sleep hygiene. Two AMA members shared what doctors want patients to know about how to get to sleep and wake up ready for the day ahead.

5 With restless leg syndrome, medication and massage can help

When night falls and many people fall into a peaceful slumber, a peculiar torment may take hold of others: restless leg syndrome. This uncomfortable sensation can rob many of rest, leaving them weary the following day. This

silent thief of sleep, known for its incessant twitching and relentless urge to move, is a condition that is baffling and widespread.

Restless leg syndrome—also called Willis-Ekbom disease—causes significant symptoms in about 3% of Americans. Women are more likely to have restless leg syndrome than men. And while most symptoms develop among people middle aged or older, children can also have restless leg syndrome. A sleep medicine physician summarized what patients with restless leg syndrome should expect so they can find relief and achieve a restful slumber.

Matthew Daniel Epstein, MD, discusses what patients need to know about restless leg syndrome. He is a sleep medicine physician and associate director of the Atlantic Health Sleep Centers in Morristown, New Jersey. Atlantic Health System also is a member of the [AMA Health System Program](#).

When it comes to effective doctor-patient communication, it's important that both parties are speaking from a base of shared knowledge. The AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know series explores dozens of health topics, including [climate change](#), [inflammatory bowel disease](#) and [vertigo](#).