

# Newsflash

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## More Exercise Linked with Lower Risk of Irregular Heartbeat

Postmenopausal women who reported the highest amount of physical activity had a 10 percent lower risk of developing atrial fibrillation (AF), a condition characterized by an irregular heartbeat, than women who reported the lowest amount of physical activity. Both obese and normal-weight women reaped the benefits of being more physically active.

The women who had the lowest risk of AF got physical activity that was approximately equivalent to brisk walking for 30 minutes, six days a week, for a total of about three hours a week. Even women who got the activity equivalent of walking briskly for one hour a week had a lower risk of AFT than women who got less than 10 minutes of exercise each week.

AF has been identified as a risk factor for stroke and heart failure. The researchers noted that their findings did not support concerns that strenuous exercise might increase the risk of AF in postmenopausal women.



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## Better Sleep Tips

Sleep drugs are sold with the promise of a good night’s rest. For the estimated 25% of Americans who occasionally struggle with sleep or the 10 percent with chronic insomnia, drugs may seem like a quick route to relief.

New evidence, however, suggest that drugs aren’t as useful as once thought. They can pose significant risks, especially for older adults. Instead of turning to a sleep aid consider trying one or more of the following approaches, which may be your ticket to a good night’s sleep.

1. **Stay on schedule.** Go to bed and get up at the same time every day. Can’t sleep? Leave the bedroom and do something restful, such as reading until you feel sleepy. If you nap, do so before 3 p.m. for no more than 30 minutes.
2. **Make changes in your bedroom.** Block out noise and outside light. Make sure that our mattress and room temperature are comfortable. Remove the TV.
3. **Eat and drink wisely.** Avoid or minimize alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine; they can affect sleep. Don’t eat heavily within several hours of bedtime.
4. **Exercise regularly.** It promotes healthy sleep (but not shortly before bedtime).
5. **Get natural light.** A study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that people exposed to natural light at work slept better and longer.
6. **Turn off e-readers and other devices 2 hours before bedtime.** They can emit blue light, which suppresses levels of melatonin, the hormone that regulates sleep. If you can’t unplug, dim the device and hold it at least 14 inches from your eyes.
7. **Reduce stress.** Meditation, yoga, and tai chi can help. For example, a study published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society found that six months of tai chi three times per week helped older adults fall asleep faster and sleep longer.
8. **Get a checkup.** Some medications and health problems can disrupt sleep, so see your doctor if lifestyle strategies haven’t helped after a month.
9. **Try sleep therapy.** Research has found that cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is quite effective at helping people with sleep problems fall asleep and stay asleep. CBT-I is often covered by insurance and doesn’t require a significant time commitment. Patients usually see improvements after only six visits.

## 5 Easy Ways to Spring Clean Your Health

No matter how good your intentions, it can be difficult to stay healthy during the winter: the season of comfort food, cozy sweaters and Netflix marathons.

But with spring finally here, you're likely ready to shed your cold-weather cocoon and return to the healthy habits of seasons past. Here are five things to do to spring clean your health and jumpstart your warmer weather routines.

**Prioritize good sleep.** It's the most important biorhythm, but too often ignored. For the average adult, the aim is eight to nine hours of sleep a night. Your bedroom needs to be as quiet and dark as possible. To get your mind prepared for sleep after an active day, meditate for five minutes before slipping into bed.

**Find excuses to move – outside of the gym.** As the weather gets nicer, people can go outside more and move more. Your goal should be a minimum of 10,000 steps a day, eventually getting to 12,000 steps a day. As the weather warms, there are more opportunities to go for walks with friends, walk for coffee, play outdoor sports like golf and tennis, hike, garden and do outdoor home repairs.

**Set a good alarm.** A "good alarm" can be used to remind you to establish and develop healthier habits. For example, set a good alarm to remind yourself to start a bedtime routine so you get an adequate amount of rest. You can also set a good alarm as a nudge to drink more water, stand up (for those who have a sedentary job) or to remind you to eat a healthy meal, if you often work through your lunch hour.

**Develop better sunscreen habits.** A recent study has shown that an ultra-high SPF (100+) sunscreen does provide better sun protection, compared to SPF 50. We do not apply as much sunscreen as we should, and we do not reapply. This means that the protection we're getting is, in fact, less than what is labeled on the bottle, as the SPF value gets diluted out. Choose a sunscreen with the highest SPF possible, as an insurance policy to provide the best protection for the longest period of time.

**Greet the day.** Take advantage of the increased sunlight in the mornings to set your circadian pacemaker, also known as your body's sleep clock. Choose a consistent wake-up time in the morning and aim for a 20-minute walk after waking up. The sunlight will program your body clock and help regularize your sleep and wake rhythm. If you focus on programming your wake-up time, then your bedtime will naturally start drifting into place.



## Get the Feel-Better Benefits of Yoga

*Reap the rewards of this mind-body practice, even if you're not flexible.*

More than 1 in 5 people taking a yoga class in America are older than 60. That's no surprise, experts say, because yoga, which blends movements and poses with deep breathing and meditation, can be beneficial and enjoyable for older adults.

Yoga is generally considered safe, but injuries can occur. A study published in 2016 in the Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine found that adults older than 65 have a higher rate of injury. Here's how to reap the rewards of yoga safely.

### HOW CAN YOGA HELP

Helping people manage chronic pain and maintain mobility may be among the best-studied benefits of yoga. For instance, a 2017 Cochrane review of 12 clinical trials on yoga for chronic low-back pain found that practicing it led to small to moderate improvements in function after three and six months. Such benefits are important because persistent pain can cause people to lead a more sedentary lifestyle...if you don't use it, you lose it.

Yoga may help alleviate discomfort by improving flexibility and building muscle and core strength. Deep breathing could contribute, too. Controlled breathing has been used to control pain for centuries.

### CHOOSE THE RIGHT TYPE

Beginners may do best to look for classes described as restorative, gentle, or Iyengar. These use props such as blankets and bolsters to make poses more accessible. Let your instructor know if you have any health issues, such as arthritis. That way, he or she can show you modifications to poses. If you have balance or mobility problems, chair yoga, done while sitting or using a chair for support, may be a good option.

The International Association of Yoga Therapists ([iayt.org](http://iayt.org)) or Yoga Alliance ([yogaalliance.org](http://yogaalliance.org)) can help you find instructors experienced in gentle or restorative yoga. And don't overdo it. People get injured in yoga when they push themselves too hard. A yoga pose should feel steady and comfortable, not strained.