

You Matter Too: Evidence Based-Women's Health and Making Time for Yourself

Kristen A. Zarfos, MD, FACS



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Our goal tonight:



To share evidence-based women's health information and learn from your questions what is most important to you in your health



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Introduction:

Kristen A. Zarfos, MD, FACS

Retired general, vascular surgeon, in private practice, followed by academically based breast health and cancer surgeon

Former Director of the Comprehensive Women's Health Center

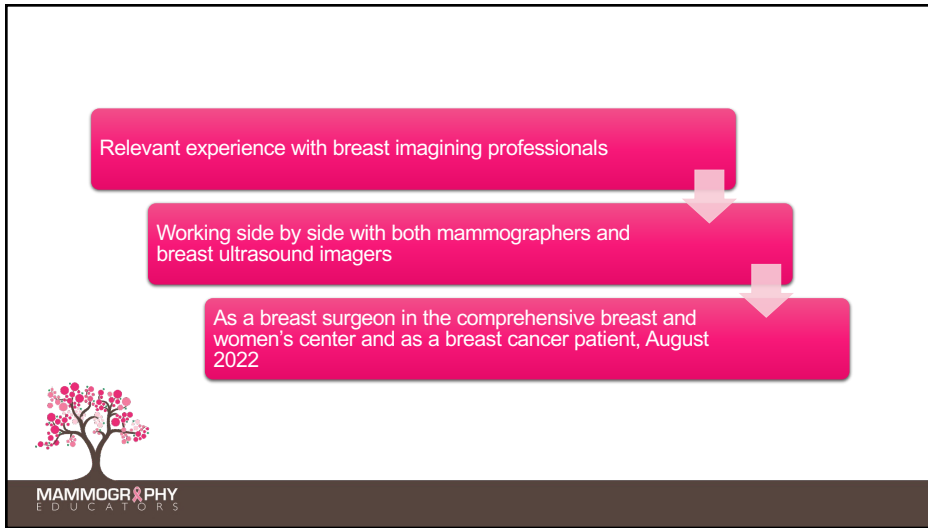
St. Francis Medical Center, Trinity Health, Hartford, Connecticut

Women's health advocate and speaker

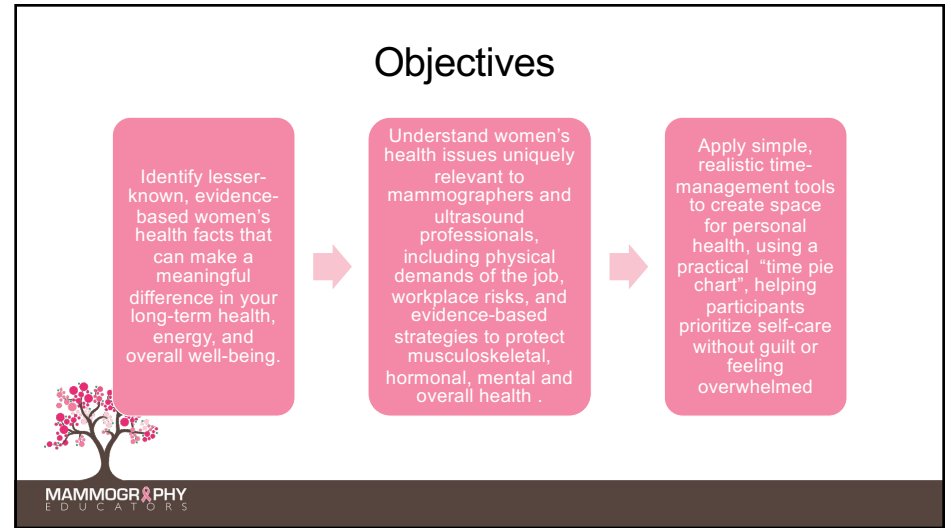


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Disclosures:

None

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Appreciation of the critical role you have as the first person with whom a woman will interact in her journey from a breast abnormality to the diagnosis of breast cancer.

Not only does the woman's experience with you matter critically, in itself, but you, and that first experience set the stage for the entire journey. If she feels truly being "seen" as a person, not just a patient, by you treating her with kindness, respect and compassion, is sets her journey off on the right step.

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All of you know this, but few other colleagues understand what a tight rope you walk with each and every person who you take care of.

It is not easy to remain professional and not allowing your eyes or face to reveal any recognition of an abnormality that you recognize on an image while we the patients are staring at your face hoping to will you to tell us that everything is ok.

And you must do this, while at the same time being kind and caring to the patient. Yes, it is balance, on a tight rope !

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Striking and maintaining the balance of being caring and compassionate, yet not revealing your concern about what the image shows is hard.

Yet, all of you do it day in and day out for years.

We—the patients and We—the breast surgeons, who inherit the patients who you have started on their journey...


Thank you!



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And, that is why I am here today!


To recognize and thank you for the critically important work that you do day in and day out , by equipping you with the facts to help maintain and optimize your own health with as much commitment to yourself as you give to your patients



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Outline:

- I. Introduction
- II. General health strategies
- III. Specific strategies for mammography and ultrasound imagers
- IV. Your time pie chart



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General Women's Health Strategies for all women

Diet, Exercise, Screenings

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Diet – *the fuel you put into your physical engine will determine how well your engine works.*

- Think: variety and color
- 6+ fruits and veggies per day – the more colorful, along with green, the better for energy production
- Whole grains – read the package to confirm true whole grains
- Limit processed foods – if there are 5+ ingredients, think twice, and choose a cleaner, less complex food

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Diet – *the fuel you put into your physical engine will determine how well your engine works.*

- Avoid white foods – white flour and sugar
- Incorporate legumes and beans
- Limit red meat and foods high in fat, but be sure you are eating enough protein, fish, chicken, eggs, nuts, dairy, each day to build your muscles
- Limit alcohol

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Rule of Thumb – *think of food as your energy source (as well as fun!)*

- Ask yourself, *If I eat this, will I really feel better?*
- Or...
- Will I feel bloated, sleepy, or swollen, e.g., with salty products

Food = Fuel & Fun!

Ask yourself:

✓ Will this make me feel good? 😊

✗ Or will this make me feel lousy? 😴 😞

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Exercise – *You are on your feet most of the day. How do you keep your muscles in good shape to do this?*

- Aerobic exercise – 150 minutes/week
- Strength/weight exercises (can be tapes) – 2 times/week
- Balance, yoga/Pilates
- Stretching is critical for the work you do – 2 times/day



Aerobic exercise – 150 minutes/week

Balance, yoga/Pilates



Strength/weight training/exercises (could be tapes)

STRETCHING!



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REMEMBER;

Goals, not absolutes

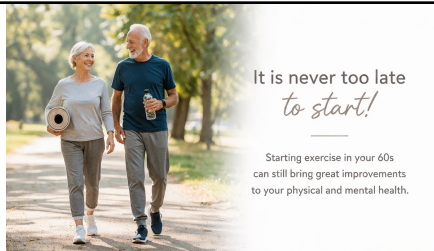


Any exercise is better than none.



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It is never too late
to start!

Starting exercise in your 60s can still bring great improvements to your physical and mental health.



The earlier you begin, the easier it is to make it a habit.
Just like brushing your teeth!



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Screenings – The cobbler’s children who are barefoot

You are the standard bearers of screening as mammographers.

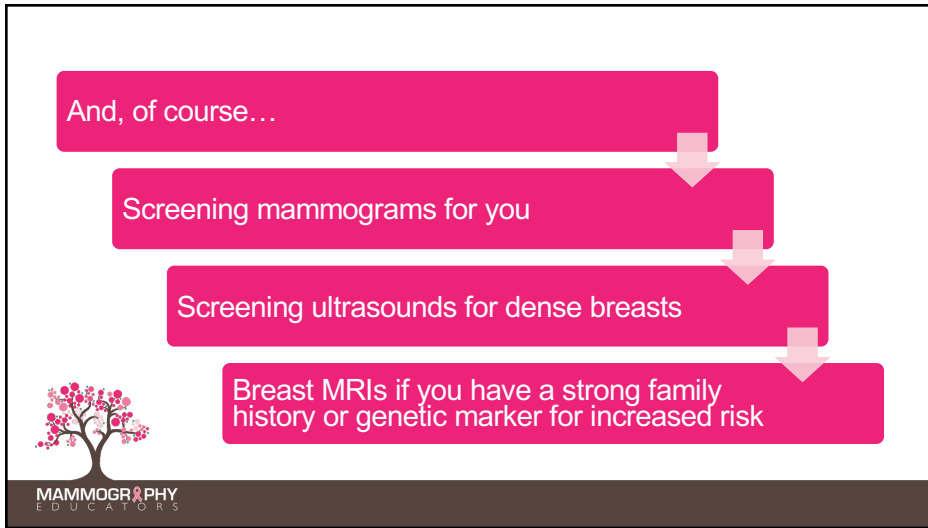
Screening mammography saves lives!

Screening ultrasounds in women with dense breast critically change lives by finding cancers earlier than otherwise possible .



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Screenings

You are the standard bearers of screening as mammographers.

Screening mammography saves lives!

Screening ultrasounds in women with dense breast critically change lives by finding cancers earlier than otherwise possible .

Yet, frequently, as health care professionals, somehow, we overlook our own screenings.

My story with colon cancer screening
-- Be smarter than I was...

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Screenings

In America today:

- 50% of colon cancers are found in people younger than 60 years
- More and more frequently, people are diagnosed as young, as in their 20s
- Start screening at age 45, unless you have a family history of colon cancer, then screening should start earlier

Annual physical exam

Gyn exams, as per your gynecologist's recommendation

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And, of course...

Screening mammograms for you

Screening ultrasounds for dense breasts

Breast MRIs if you have a strong family history or genetic marker for increased risk

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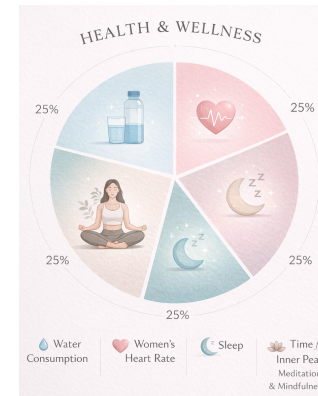
Breast Self Exam – Is this controversial or not?

- Common sense tells us – just like a baseline mammogram for comparison – how can you know if you have a change in your breast if you don't know the baseline, normal texture is, nor what they look like before there is a change?
- Plus, how many women have you seen who found their own cancers before found on mammogram, ultrasound or by their clinician??



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Focused health strategies for mammography and ultrasound imagers.



Water intake

Musculoskeletal – specifically your legs and feet

Your heart – and the impact of stress

Sleep – the under appreciated, but vital element of our health

Maintaining your inner peace and calm – in the stress of your work



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Water Intake – Water In and Water out



Water IN – When do you have time to drink enough water at work?



Even more difficult – trying to drink enough when you are *not* at work



WHY???



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The problem is... Water out



When do you have time for water out at work or when you are buzzing around doing all that you need to do when not at work?



At work, this is the main issue in water consumption among health care professionals, in which our time is owned by our patients' needs.



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Yet, water intake is critically important to your health, and we must take care of ourselves first, to be able to deliver our best patient care.

Our bodies are 60-80% water. Common sense, and research, tells us that if we are not drinking enough water, our bodies don't function well, resulting in:

- Being less alert
- Headaches
- Poorer short-term memory
- More fatigued
- Poor mood
- Dizziness, if really little intake



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If you are prone to urinary tract infections (UTIs):



Drinking enough water every day can prevent recurrent UTIs



More on recurrent UTIs later...



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GOAL – 2 liters per day. Ask your physician/PA/NP specific goal for your weight and health issues.

THIRST is *not* a guide.

By the time you are thirsty, you are already dehydrated.



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What can you do?

This takes a little planning the night before.



Plan your day with the goal of 1.5 - 2 liters per day, focused on when you will have time to empty your bladder.



Only you know what quantity your bladder hold.



And, for how long and what your schedule is for the day.



Maybe drink as soon as you awaken, before you leave home so that your bladder is emptied before sitting in traffic.



In between patients, 30 minutes or however long your bladder holds.



Before your lunch break and other breaks.

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Reward: You will simply will feel better!!

Added bonus – drinking enough water also helps with losing weight and maintaining weight loss.



- Two other points:
 - Drink plenty of water when traveling (dehydration is a risk factor for developing blood clots)
 - Drink lots of water after exercising
 - While there is debate as to whether there is less muscle aching after exercising with drinking enough fluids, there is no debate that drinking water after exercise is essential for muscle recovery.



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Sidebar concerning recurrent urinary tract infections:

This is not unique to women in your profession

This is relevant for postmenopausal women. (If not you, perhaps your mother or grandmother).

If you are post menopausal:

And are having recurrent urinary tract infections

And are drinking enough water and taking your full course of antibiotics

And the infections keep occurring

*Discuss the possibility of post menopausal vaginal dryness being a factor with your gynecologist or primary care provider.

Research has shown that vaginal estrogen can decrease recurrent UTIs and does not cause breast cancer. This easy solution may solve a chronic problem, prevent pain, discomfort, fatigue, and antibiotic resistance.



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Musculoskeletal Stress for Mammographers and Ultrasonographers

- We could spend days on this topic!
- There is so much more on the ergonomics of your work that we don't have time to discuss, but I encourage you to learn about the critical importance of the health of your legs AND feet.



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Musculoskeletal Stress for Mammographers and Ultrasonographers

Your back : Briefly ,

- Exercising will build your muscles to decrease the risk of injury and chronic pain

Think :

- Posture every day, and throughout the day
- Scapulas in your back pockets
- Clavicles pulled up
- Ears over shoulders, and
- String pulling up from the top of your head

Stretch, stretch , stretch!

- Before arising while still in bed, before going to work, when you arrive home and before bed.



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How critically important is the health of your legs and feet?



Spending up to 8 hours each day standing on your legs creates a great deal of back pressure for the venous system in your legs to handle.



Varicose veins: Some of you might have these, some may not. There is a genetic component to who will develop them. However, even, if you do not have a genetic predisposition to developing varicosities, standing for prolonged periods of time can cause them to appear.



And, even if you do not see varicosities, after prolonged standing with dependent blood in your legs' venous system, your veins will progressively stretch and be less efficient in delivering blood back to your heart.



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Why does this matter?



With the blood pooling in your veins, you might experience aching legs feeling heavy and potential ankle and lower leg swelling.



This aching and heaviness can contribute to your fatigue, without even thinking about it.



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Why does this matter?

- With progressive age, even chronic venous stasis changes can occur in the skin of your calves, shins, and feet. I am sure all of you have seen these changes in patients' legs.
- It is not just the appearance of the skin and chronic swelling, but the fact that both the skin and underlying develop fragility to even the least bit of contact or trauma.
- In addition, the skin and underlying tissues are impaired in their ability to heal.
- This can potentially lead to chronic venous stasis ulcers, and subsequent infection.
- All of which interferes in the quality of life as you age.



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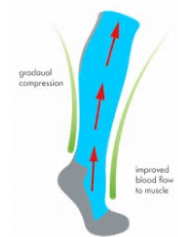
While it is hard to imagine being old enough to have chronic venous changes in your life, leg heaviness, swelling and feeling more fatigued than necessary is surely something that none of us want at any age.

What to do (even at a young age):

Be preemptive: even without heaviness or varicose veins, wear compression stockings.

Jobst or Sigvaris are established brands. There are other brands available in colors and designs. Since most imagers wear slacks, nobody will notice.

Be careful that the stockings are firmly compressive at the ankles, and not tight at the top. The latter would further impede venous blood flow, and defeat the purpose of support from the ankle cephalad.



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Elevate your legs whenever possible.
Fighting gravity with elevation will make your legs feel better and give you more energy.



Keep the legs moisturized once a day and perhaps before bed.

This will prevent the skin from cracking. It also helps that when you are applying lotion, you are also massaging your legs.



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Your feet are your best friend! Treat them as such!

Why? If your feet ache, your whole body feels off kilter, and again, pain and discomfort, cause fatigue.



Think of what feet endure and how agile they can be when necessary.



Moisturize and massage regularly, along with meticulous nail care.

There is nothing worse than the discomfort in your feet or toes when you are in a professional role, in which you are on your feet for many hours.



Buy comfortable, solidly fitting shoes.



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Your Heart and the Stress That You Handle Every Day

- You interact with women very closely who are frightened that they might be facing a potentially life changing diagnosis. They are scared. As a patient, I was scared of the results of my mammogram and ultrasound.
- We cannot minimize how very physically close to the patients you are.



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Your Heart and the Stress That You Handle Every Day

For you to have to handle one of the most personal and intimate parts of their bodies amplifies the stress that you might experience because each and every woman feels very differently about being touched and in very close proximity to another person, while feeling very vulnerable about what their imaging might show and means for their lives.



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Your Heart and the Stress That You Handle Every Day

Plus, you might be caring for patients who hate the health care system because of a past negative experience, may be crying, may be abrupt and harsh to you, as a manifestation of their anger or fear. You have seen and experienced it all.



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This stress on you can potentially impact your heart health.



We will talk later about managing that stress, but now I want you to know the too little discussed, but very important, facts of women's heart disease.



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Heart disease is the leading cause of death in American women.

- 1 in 4 women in America die from heart disease each year:
- 500,000 women die from heart disease each year
 - 325,000 men die from heart disease each year
 - 40,000 women die from breast cancer



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Why?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6

Women are more likely to dismiss the warning signs (which may also be true with providers) because neither women nor the providers have been taught the warning signs.

Women have worse outcomes from heart disease than men... and, higher rates of death.

WHY??
Because of delay in diagnosis.

Studies have shown that providers are more likely to dismiss the symptoms of heart disease in women.

The average age of a heart attack – myocardial infarction – is 69 in women.

But heart attacks are increasing in women ages 35-54.

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What can you do? For yourself and for the women in your life?

Know the subtle symptoms of heart disease:

- Shortness of breath – going up stairs or with slight exertion
- Unusual fatigue – out of proportion to fatigue in the past or relative to activity
- Cold sweats
- Malaise
- Jaw or back pain
- Chest pressure or pain MAY be present, and is reason to be seen
- Women are far more likely to NOT have chest pain during a heart attack

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What can you do? For yourself and for the women in your life?

Nausea or indigestion

Sweating

Dizziness

If you, your friend, relative, coworker, or patient are having symptoms –

Don't Wait – seek medical attention ASAP

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SLEEP – Vital to all aspects of your health!

Do any of you here consistently sleep 7-8 hours each night?

If you do, Good for you! It has taken me 69 years to achieve this goal— hopefully not too late!

Sleep is one of the most fascinating processes in our body.

Until 2018 it was not recognized what a fundamental role it plays in our entire health

Multiple studies published in the journals, Science and Nature in 2018, followed by...

Many others since show that sleep is not just a "break" or "time out" .

The process of sleeping actually detoxifies and cleanses our brain tissue of waste materials and toxins.

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Sleep is fundamental to:



Decreasing inflammation in our body, especially when our body is attacking our own cells



Maintaining cardiovascular health



Avoiding depression



Slowing the aging process of memory loss- dementia



Problem solving

Too little sleep leads to brain damage.



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Sleep: How much do we need? (Not how much can we “get by” with!)

Research shows that the majority of us require **7-9 hours everyday**.

Recent data shows that not only is the quantity of sleep important, but also equally important is the **CONSISTENCY** of our sleep pattern.

The new recommendation is that we should:

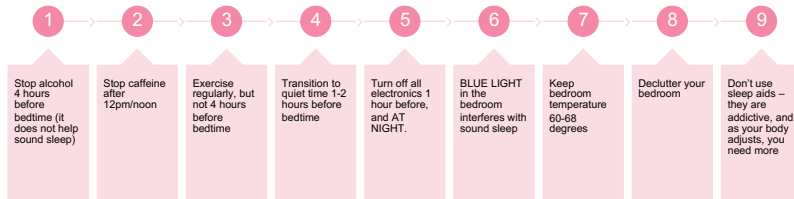
Go to bed, and arise within 30 minutes of the **same time** everyday.

What happened to sleeping in on the weekend to “catch up” on lost sleep during the work week?????

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Difficulty getting to sleep? Here are some tips:



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Fall asleep, but then awoken and cannot get back to sleep?

Welcome to the club! This is very common.

Researched suggestion:

- Move to another place, knit, read, meditate, sit upright
- These strategies can help your system to calm down, and then return to bed hen you begin to feel drowsy.



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“Menopausal” sleep disturbances in women aged late 40s and older...

Do these symptoms sound familiar?

- Awaken drenched in sweat
- Fatigued all the time
- Unexplained weight gain
- Mental fogginess
- Feeling the need to take a nap during the day
- Headaches
- Depression



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Sleep Apnea vs Menopausal Sleep Disturbances

- These changes might be attributed to menopause, but too frequently, it is a misdiagnosis and a more life threatening condition is being missed.
 - Sleep Apnea
- Sleep Apnea is a condition in which we stop breathing while sleeping.



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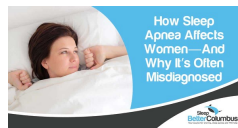
Why do I find this so important for you to know?

Research shows that very frequently these symptoms are either ignored or attributed to menopause by practitioners and not addressed.

Many times, women are just told to “put up with it”, because it is due to menopause

And... Yes, it might be due to menopause, but in those women who have sleep apnea, they are being denied life impacting treatment.

- Myth:
 - Women with sleep apnea are always overweight, older, and snore.
- Facts:
 - Young women may have sleep apnea
 - Thin women can have sleep apnea
 - You can have sleep apnea and not snore
 - You can snore and not have sleep apnea.



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Bottom Line:

If you or someone you know has these symptoms, please see your health care provider and ask the question: “*Should I be tested for sleep apnea?*”



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Stress Management: Maintaining inner peace and calm

Lastly, but probably should be the # 1 discussion point, is how critically vital it is that we work to prioritize for ourselves to establishing and maintaining our inner peace and calm everyday.



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Stress Management: Maintaining inner peace and calm

- As women, in our roles of juggling multiple jobs all of the time
- Even more important in the work that you do – you matter
- But also, in setting the standard for your coworkers and the patients who you are caring for.
- Because calmness is contagious! Think about when you have been in an emergency situation at work, how comforting it is to have the person in charge be calm. This is true for you, as the provider of care for your patients. Patients can sense your calmness and they respond by feeling calmer.



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Stress Management: Maintaining inner peace and calm



Before we can seek inner peace, we need to recognize what jolts us out of our calmness, resulting in our feeling stressed.



Write a list:

What disturbs your calmness (2 categories: work and in your personal life)
Identify what triggers your feeling unsettled
Identify the physical cues you experience that tell you that you are starting to feel stressed



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In the moment, here are a few strategies:

- Take a slow, deep breath and refocus to your sense of inner calm
- Mantra – Repeat:
 - “I will not be ruffled”
 - “I will be calm”
 - “My core is peaceful”



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Harvard Medical School's Portable Guide to Stress Relief:



If you have only 1 minute:

- Sit comfortably, take a few slow breaths and quietly repeat to yourself: "I am" as you breath in, "at peace" as you breath out
- Repeat 2-3 times
- Relax into the support of the chair.
- Once you feel you are restored, continue back to the task at hand



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Harvard Medical School's Portable Guide to Stress Relief:



If you only have 2 minutes:

- Count down slowly from 10 to zero
- With each number, slowly take one complete breath
- Breath in slowly, saying "10", then breath out slowly. Afterwards, you should feel refreshed.
- If you feel lightheaded, count down more slowly .



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Harvard Medical School's Portable Guide to Stress Relief:



If you only have 3 minutes

- Sitting down, check your body for tension.
- Relax your face muscles, letting your jaw fall open slightly
- Let your shoulders drop, arms falling to your sides
- Loosen your hands, with spaces between your fingers
- Uncross your legs and ankles
- Let thighs sink into the chair
- Let shins and calves become heavier, and feet root into the floor
- Breath in slowly, then out slowly, and relax with each exhalation even more



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Harvard Medical School's Portable Guide to Stress Relief:



If you only have 5 minutes – Self massage

- Knead the muscles at the back of your neck and shoulders
- Work tiny circles with thumbs at base of skull
- Massage your scalp with finger tips
- Tap fingers against scalp, front to back and side to side
- Massage your face with series of tiny circles with thumbs and finger tips, especially temples, forehead, jaw muscles, bridge of nose, eyebrows to temples
- Close your eyes; cup hands loosely over face and exhale easily for a short while



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Harvard Medical School's Portable Guide to Stress Relief:



If you only have 10 minutes: Try imagery

- Sit comfortable in a quiet room
- Breathe deeply for a few minutes
- Now picture yourself in a place that brings up good memories
- Think about what you might smell – flowers, freshly mown hay or grass, crisp fall air, etc, whatever brings you joy
- What do you hear? Birds singing, the sound of rainfall (Calm app)
- Drink in the colors and shapes in your mind's eye
- Focus on the senses:
 - Swoosh of a gentle wind on your face
 - Cool grass on your feet
 - Salty smell and sound of waves
 - Passively observe intrusive thoughts and let them pass through your mind, and return to your imagery



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Gratitude List



One other recommended means of handling stress, which I do frequently, is I make a list of everything that is bothering me or that I think is amiss in my life.



With that list, I prioritize what needs to be addressed asap, and possible solutions to the other stressors.

- Then I force myself to make a list of all that is good in my life, and what I am grateful for.
- Amazingly this list is always much longer than the first list, and as recommended by many experts, it helps to put into perspective, and then create an action plan to address the stressors.
- It also helps to address what we can change and acknowledge what is beyond our control to change.



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However, before trying any of these suggestions, there is work to be done to open your mind to receiving these strategies. Research shows that ways to help open your mind to build a core of inner calm.



Spend as much time, as possible outside, and in nature - eat lunch outside then take a walk



Put down your phone or screen. Blue light and the constant barrage of stimuli to our brains have been shown to increase the "fight or fright", cortisol response, resulting in increased stress



Carving out designated time for yourself, with quiet time, exercise, time with friends – whatever gives you joy



Meditation



Mindfulness



Spiritual practice, whether formal religious practice or your own connection with the universe, however you define it, with the goal of seeking and incorporating what practices or activities gives you the sense that you are not alone and which bring comfort, inner peace, and inner strength.



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Pie Chart Time Management

Step # 1: Make a list of what is really important to you

How a 24-Hour Day is Divided



What you must do – sleep, work, travel time to work, family responsibilities?

How much time does each require?

8 hours for sleep

8 hours for work+ transportation time

That leaves 8 hours for everything else!!



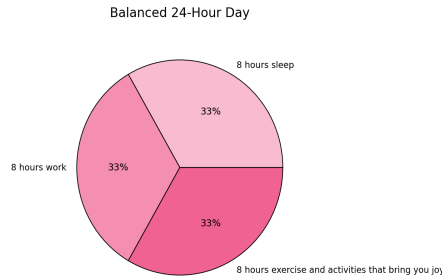
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Pie Chart Time Management

Step # 2: This is the hard part on how you fit in everything that you want to do.

- But... It provides you an opportunity to do what most people rarely do
- To pause, and take time to really look at your life and what is important to you and what your goals are, not just for the present, but also long term



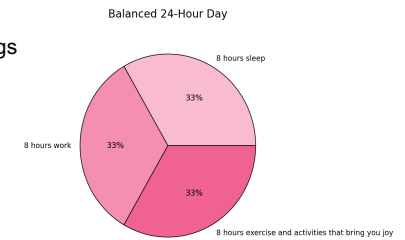
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Pie Chart Time Management


Step # 3: In slicing up the remaining 8 hours, be sure to put your health as #1, with exercise and all else that we have talked about today.


- Why? Because you will not be able to do the things you want to do (and, by the way), if you are not healthy
- Plus, you cannot take care of those who depend on and love you unless you are healthy.





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 So, pick up a pencil/pen and start writing and reflecting on what truly does and will bring joy into your life. Start tonight!

 Don't feel selfish in taking care of yourself and your health.


 In fact, it is a gift to those in your life for you to stay healthy physically and emotionally


 Make this non-negotiable!




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 Patience with your self – This is a work in progress


 Don't become frustrated or give up if you set goals and find they are difficult to stick with—this will definitely happen, but you can learn from that experience what is feasible and works.


 Actually, this is life: we set goals, achieve some, readjust some, and come out better for having done so






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 Learning as you go – be Flexible with yourself

 Remember to be flexible: Perhaps you set the goal of meeting a good friend every week for coffee, dinner, etc, but it turns out it can only happen every other week. But... every other week is better than every 6 months.

 Our personal relationships are vital and worth gold in our lives!

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Re-assess every 3-6 months

Mark the 3-6 month date on your calendar from the date that you set up your pie chart

Re-evaluate how you are using your time.

Are you happy with how you are spending your time? Doing the things that are meaningful to you?

If not, re-adjust.

- The goal is to have joy in how you spend each day.
- Some days there will be more joy than others.

But always stay in tune with who you are and how you want to spend your life




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Most importantly, don't be hard on yourself.

By definition by what you do professionally, you are perfectionists.





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Your Pie Chart does not need to be perfect, it will be a work in progress, flexing as your life progresses.

The purpose of creating a pie chart is for you to take a look at who you are, what defines you and what brings you joy, and make your day in and day out life what you want it to be.

And, as the years pass, you will not look back with regret that you had not tried to live the life that you want.

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Thank You!

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