



Narcolepsy Perspectives: A blog about anything & everything Narcolepsy

A Beginner's Guide to Managing Heart Health and Narcolepsy

March 31, 2026 - Living with Narcolepsy is a unique journey, filled with daily challenges and victories. When you add heart health into the mix, things can feel even more complicated. Managing both can be difficult. Even small changes in your lifestyle and knowing what to monitor and what to ask your healthcare provider can make it much easier.

Understanding the Connection

Data shows that people diagnosed with chronic sleep disorders, like Narcolepsy, have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease.^{1,2} Research indicates a significant link between chronic sleep disorders, which disrupt the body's natural sleep architecture, and cardiovascular disease. Poor quality sleep, common in Narcolepsy, is associated with increased [sympathetic nervous system](#) activity which can lead to elevated heart rate, blood pressure and inflammation.

Keeping Tabs on Heart Health

For most people, implementing a few daily habits is enough to support and monitor your cardiovascular system.

- **Maintain a heart healthy diet:** Fruits, vegetables and lean protein and watch sodium intake.
- **Track your blood pressure and pulse:** Use a home blood pressure monitor to check your readings in the morning and evening. Keep a written journal, or track them in a smartphone app, making it easier to spot potential abnormalities.
- **Notice how you feel:** Pay attention to symptoms like shortness of breath, chest discomfort, leg swelling or unusual tiredness. (This can be challenging with Narcolepsy but trust your body's rhythms.) These can be signs your heart needs extra attention.
- **Notice any palpitations:** If your heart suddenly feels like it's racing or skipping beats, pause and acknowledge it. Your doctor will want to know what you were doing and when it happened, so make a note.



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- **Weigh yourself:** Sudden, overnight weight gain (two or more pounds) can signal fluid retention and is something your doctor should know about.

By making these habits part of your routine, you'll be better equipped to spot any issues early.

Medication Considerations

Stimulant medications can help with Narcolepsy, but they can raise heart rate and blood pressure. Sodium content of medications should also be considered as taking certain medications including prescription and over-the-counter medications can increase a person's daily sodium intake.³

Talk to your doctor if this happens with a new medication or one that you've been taking for a while. Sometimes medication to help control blood pressure is needed.

It's important to keep your doctor informed about any over-the-counter medications or supplements you take to avoid any negative impact on your heart health. Any time you notice medication side effects, tell your healthcare provider. Remember, you are the most important person on your healthcare team.

You may want to ask your doctor:

- "How do my Narcolepsy medications affect my heart rate or blood pressure?"
- "Should I check my blood pressure or heart rate more often because of these medications?"
- "What symptoms should I watch for that would signal a heart-related problem?"
- "Are there warning signs (like palpitations or headaches) that mean I should call you right away?"

Exercise Adaptations for Excessive Daytime Sleepiness

It is well known that exercise is good for heart health. It can increase energy and alertness, while decreasing depressive episodes, but [Excessive Daytime Sleepiness](#) (EDS) can make it difficult to stick to a routine.

Here are some questions for your doctor before starting a new routine:



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- “What types of physical activity are realistic and beneficial given my daytime sleepiness?”
- “How can I balance activity with fatigue without worsening my symptoms?”
- “Are short bouts of exercise still helpful for heart health?”

Home Blood Pressure Monitoring

Checking your blood pressure is one of the best ways to protect your heart health. Here’s how to get started:

- **Choose the right monitor:** Look for an automatic, cuff-style monitor that fits your upper arm.
- **Measure at the same time each day:** Morning and evening are good choices. Sit still for a few minutes before measuring with your feet flat on the floor.
- **Record your results:** Write down the date, time and your readings. Some monitors store your numbers or connect to a smartphone app for easy tracking.
- **Know your target range:** Ask your doctor what your target blood pressure numbers should be. Most adults should keep their blood pressure [below 120/80 mmHg](#), but your personal target might be different.
- **Look for patterns:** One high reading isn’t typically cause for concern. Watch for trends or several high readings in a row and share them with your doctor.

Here are some practical lifestyle tips shared by people living with Narcolepsy:

Small changes can make a big difference in both heart health and Narcolepsy management. Here are some practical tips to try:

- **Eat heart-healthy foods:** Focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins and healthy fats. Limit salt (maximum amount for healthy adult 1,500-2300 mg/day), sugar and processed foods.⁴
- **Stay hydrated:** Drinking enough water helps with energy and blood pressure control.
- **Exercise at the right time:** Plan to exercise during the times of day that you feel most awake but avoid strenuous activity close to bedtime.



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- **Focus on sleep hygiene:** This can be challenging with Narcolepsy but try to establish routines that work for you and stick with them.
- **Manage stress:** Deep breathing, meditation or gentle activities like listening to music can help with relaxation.
- **Limit caffeine and alcohol:** These can affect both your sleep and heart health — and may interfere with medication.
- **Don't smoke:** If you smoke, talk to your doctor about programs and support to help you kick the habit.
- **Stay connected:** Spending time with friends and family or joining a support group can lift your mood and motivation.

Conclusion

Managing heart health alongside Narcolepsy isn't about perfection. It's about making small, consistent choices that add up over time. Be your own best advocate by staying informed, tracking blood pressure and other symptoms and keeping an open dialogue with your healthcare team.

The connection between sleep and heart health is real, but so is your ability to influence it. Every choice matters — whether it's swapping one processed meal for a heart-healthy option or just paying closer attention to how your body feels.

You don't have to figure this out alone. Wake Up Narcolepsy connects a national community of people who understand what you're navigating. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do for your health is connect with someone who understands. *Learn more about the connection between [Hearts & Rest](#).*

- *Help support and shape someone else's journey by [sharing your story](#).*
- *Learn more about our heart health partners at [WomenHeart](#) and how you can support their mission to improve the lives of women with or at risk for heart disease.*

References

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