Questions to Ask Your Doctor

1. Could I have a sleep disorder? If so, please tell me about it.
2. What kind of tests will I need?
3. What diet, exercise, and/or lifestyle changes can help my condition, if any?
4. If I have narcolepsy, what treatments are available?
5. What medications are available for me, and what are their risks and benefits?
6. Does the sodium level in my medication increase my risk of cardiovascular disease?
7. How do I find out more information about managing my sleep condition and preventing heart disease?

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Narcolepsy and Cardiovascular Disease: Why Sleep Matters

Getting to the HEART of Sleep Issues
**There is Hope**

Taking care of your health means taking control of all aspects of your health, including sleep. Getting the proper amount of rest is important. Lifestyle changes may help and can be the first line of defense.

- Maintain a regular sleep schedule.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol before bed.
- Don’t smoke.
- Avoid large or heavy meals before bed.
- Relax and turn off screens at least one hour before sleep.

Medication may help, so it is important to talk to your doctor and not suffer in silence. Medications such as stimulants and antidepressants can be used. Sodium oxybate is a medication designed to treat cataplexy and excessive daytime sleepiness. A newer low-dose sodium oxybate medication is now available and may be appropriate for heart patients.

**How Sleep Affects Your Heart**

Sleep is not a luxury. It is vital to your health. Sleep disorders and lack of proper rest can cause many health issues such as:

- High blood pressure - During normal sleep, your blood pressure goes down. Having sleep problems means your blood pressure stays higher for a longer amount of time.
- Type 2 diabetes - Diabetes is a disease that causes sugar to build up in your blood and can damage your blood vessels.
- Obesity - Lack of sleep can lead to unhealthy weight gain. This is especially true for children and adolescents who need more sleep than adults.
- Heart Disease - High blood pressure, diabetes, and long-term stress are all linked to cardiovascular disease.

**What is Narcolepsy?**

Narcolepsy is a chronic, potentially disabling condition that is thought to occur when certain chemicals in the brain are not able to regulate your body’s sleep-wake cycle. There is no cure, but there are treatments available. Narcolepsy causes symptoms such as:

- Trouble staying awake during the day
- Brain fog
- Unrefreshing sleep, fragmented sleep, or insomnia
- Irresistible urge to sleep
- Sudden loss of muscle control (known as cataplexy)

**Narcolepsy affects an estimated 1 in 2,000 people in the United States.**

It is estimated that up to 50% of people with narcolepsy are undiagnosed. Untreated Narcolepsy can lead to depression, cardiovascular disease, and other comorbidities. Memory loss, inability to concentrate, and automatic behaviors can affect relationships, academic performance, professional success and leisure activities. Diagnosing narcolepsy can be difficult, and many patients struggle for years without a proper diagnosis.

**You are not alone**

Narcolepsy is a serious medical condition that can be treated. Breaking the stigma and knowing you are not alone is an important step to a healthier sleep and heart.