“I can’t turn my mind off.”

That’s the top complaint Bill Moorcroft, Ph.D., a sleep coach with Northern Colorado Sleep Consultants, hears from people who have trouble sleeping.

Just as we need air, food and water, we need sleep to survive. Though the exact reasons why humans sleep and cycle through its complex phases remains somewhat of a mystery, we know that sleep is crucial.

As we cycle back and forth between REM (rapid eye movement) and non-REM sleep, the brain’s glial cells act as janitors, clearing away unnecessary debris. Sleep is important for everything from memory and immune system function to the body’s ability to break down sugar and repair tissues—providing an endless list of non-negotiable health benefits.

“Sleep is not a waste of time—a lot of people think that,” Moorcroft says. “Sleep helps cleanse and consolidate your memory, balances out emotions, and is important for general health and maintenance of the brain. Yet in the western world, most people don’t get the amount of sleep they need.”

The National Sleep Foundation recommends eight to 10 hours of sleep per night for teens and seven to nine hours for adults. Not getting enough good sleep has been linked to increased traffic accidents and fatalities, cognitive decline, memory loss, and myriad other mental and physical health problems including weight gain, diabetes, cardiovascular stress and depression.

There are approximately 84 known sleep disorders. Of those, insomnia and sleep apnea are two of the most common. “Insomnia can cause anxiety, frustration and anger,” Moorcroft says. “You want to be sleeping and you can’t.” Sleep apnea is the inability to breathe for intervals of time during sleep, which can negatively impact sleep quality and health in numerous ways, including being very hard on the heart.

Other sleep disorders include narcolepsy—which causes overwhelming drowsiness during the day and sudden attacks of sleep, periodic limb movement disorder—where a person’s limbs move involuntarily during sleep, and restless legs syndrome—which causes pain or discomfort in the legs at night.

“One of the top complaints in any primary care doctor’s office is related to sleep,” says Dr. Mark Petrun, medical director of sleep services at University of Colorado Health in northern Colorado.

Common patient grievances include daytime sleepiness, unrestorative sleep or a racing mind. “Our society’s 24/7 lifestyle, while not technically a sleep disorder, means that getting the recommended hours of sleep is unfortunately something a lot of us sacrifice,” says Cindy Crosby, manager of sleep diagnostic services at UCHealth’s sleep lab.

“There’s so much input every day,” agrees Petrun. “People feel like

“I humans the only mammals that willingly delay sleep.”

~ National Sleep Foundation
Food Allergy or Intolerance

by kathy hayes

The first time 11-month-old Blair was exposed to a small taste of peanuts, red spots broke out on her face and one of her eyes swelled up. Her symptoms disappeared after she had a bath. But weeks later, she accidentally touched some peanut butter and broke out in hives from head to toe. That’s when her parents knew they needed to have their daughter tested for food allergies.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, food allergies affect an estimated 4 to 6 percent of U.S. children and rates increased approximately 50 percent between 1997 and 2011.

A food allergy is an immune reaction to a particular food and will happen every time an individual is exposed to that food. Reactions can range from an itchy mouth, hives, swelling of the lips and throat and difficulty breathing to vomiting, diarrhea and, possibly death. With a true food allergy, it’s imperative to avoid any exposure to the food.

A food intolerance, sometimes confused with a food allergy or other disorder, is a non-allergic, often delayed reaction to a food, beverage, food additive or compound found in foods that produces symptoms in one or more body organs and systems. Symptoms may include intestinal gas, abdominal pain or diarrhea and are not life-threatening. Unlike a food allergy, food intolerance issues may be improved by eating less of the problem food without needing to eliminate it entirely.

No one knows for certain why reactions to food, beverages, food additives or compounds found in foods occur. Factors may be compromising our ability to properly digest our food, resulting in myriad symptoms. Some of the change may simply be due to increased awareness of the issue.

The complexity of food reactions further complicates things, says Dr. Roger Billica, a physician with Tri-Life Health in Fort Collins. “Dairy and gluten are the two most common foods people have intolerances to. But you could have an allergic reaction to dairy. Some people have an allergy to wheat but they don’t have a gluten intolerance.”

Eight food groups account for 90 percent of all allergic reactions in kids: peanuts, milk, wheat, soy, shellfish, eggs, fish and tree nuts. Kids will generally outgrow most of these allergies; however, allergies to peanuts and tree nuts may be lifelong.

If you suspect that you or your child has a food allergy, seek medical attention as soon as possible. A serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis can be fatal. An EpiPen, which contains epinephrine, is the first line of defense to treat the reaction.

Since being medically diagnosed with a peanut allergy via a skin-prick test, Blair hasn’t had any further allergic reactions. “We keep EpiPens with us all the time,” says her mom. “When we go out to eat, we tell servers that she’s allergic to peanuts. Our childcare provider is trained on what to do. Before we introduce a new food, we read the labels first.”

If you’re not dealing with a true food allergy but suspect a potential food intolerance, discuss options with your health care provider. Eliminating the food or foods causing you problems and improving your digestive health with better nutrition choices are often the most helpful ways to get healthy again, says Dr. Billica. “Our bodies want healthy foods and lots of rotation and variety.”

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Understanding the crucial difference
All pregnant women should consult with their health care provider before beginning or continuing any exercise program.
their lives are in high gear, constantly shifting in and out of overdrive, and that can be a contributing factor to sleep problems.”

In addition to the pace, structure and stresses of modern life, a recent study from Brigham and Women’s Hospital fuels a growing body of evidence that the short-wavelength blue light emitted from electronic device screens significantly impacts sleep.

The bright glow emanating from these screens can mess with our circadian clock or rhythm (the body’s natural sleep/wake cycle). It does so by suppressing internal sleep signals such as the production of melatonin, a hormone that plays a prominent role in regulating sleep.

The study linked nighttime use of light-emitting electronic devices such as iPads to feeling less sleepy at bedtime, taking longer to fall asleep, spending less time in REM sleep, and feeling sleepier and taking longer to become alert the next day.

In a recent survey from the National Sleep Foundation, 72 percent of youth age 6 to 17, and 84 percent of their parents, reported having at least one electronic device in their bedroom, such as a tablet, smart phone, computer or T.V. Many reported having multiple devices.

These findings are especially concerning given that teens have a circadian clock that naturally shifts later when they hit puberty. This makes it hard for them to get to sleep before 11 p.m., even without the artificial light of an electronic screen.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, who support later school start times for teens, young people now spend more time with screen-based media than they do in school. And with much of this activity occurring at night, before having to get up early, many teens are experiencing the impacts of poor sleep—on top of having to fight an already delayed circadian clock.

“For some teens, their circadian clock shifts in a very exaggerated way,” Moorcroft says. “I’ve treated teenagers who weren’t falling asleep until 5 a.m.” Yet with diligent, carefully-supervised behavioral treatments, it is possible to reset a person’s circadian clock—even in extreme cases, Moorcroft says.

Ideally, our circadian clock keeps us awake during the day and produces sleep at night. But countless situational and behavioral aspects can get in the way of this complex balancing act, including an overactive mind, charged emotions and bodily aches and pains.

Popping sleeping pills for whatever sleep issue ails you might bring temporary relief but it will not help the problem. “For insomnia, most studies show that behavioral treatments are what’s effective long-term,” Petrun says. “Pharmacologic treatments like sleeping pills should only be used in the short term or in extremely rare cases.”

Most insomnia sufferers don’t realize that the worst thing they can do when they can’t sleep is to stay in bed. “If you’re wide awake at 4 a.m. and you force yourself to remain lying there, even if you’re not sleeping, you’re potentially making your problem worse,” Crosby says. Instead, it’s best to get up and do something relaxing for 10 minutes or so before trying to sleep again. This is a tactic included in CBT-I (cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia), a treatment modality commonly used in sleep medicine.

Older people experiencing sleep issues may make the error of not seeking treatment for what could be a developing sleep disorder because they assume that with age comes poor sleep. People also often confuse the term ‘sleepy’ with ‘tired/fatigued.’ “Sleepiness means you can’t keep your eyes open and is almost always a reflection of poor quantity or quality of sleep, except for rare disorders like narcolepsy,” Petrun says. “Whereas a multitude of other things can cause tiredness and fatigue such as chronic pain, thyroid function, medications, depression, etc.”

The process for diagnosing a potential sleep disorder involves piecing together an in-depth medical history and carefully evaluating all of a patient’s symptoms. Sleep patterns and habits vary greatly between individuals and there isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach to identifying and addressing them.

“Sleep research is forging ahead at lightning speed and experts are uncovering more of sleep’s secrets all the time. The changes are so fast-paced in sleep medicine right now that it’s constantly evolving,” Petrun says.

As a result, sleep medicine professionals are now better equipped than ever before to successfully diagnose and treat all manner of sleep problems and disorders. “People no longer have to accept poor sleep,” Moorcroft says. “We can’t make sleep perfect for everyone, but we can often make it better.”

**Clean up your zzz’s**

Deanna O’Connell, R.D., with the Colorado Wellness Coach, shares her sleep tips:

- Create a relaxing sleeping space, free of clutter. Keep the space cool and quiet and cover your eyes if light distracts you.
- Daily exercise, such as a 20-minute walk at lunch, can do wonders to help your body relax at bedtime.
- Avoid electronic screen time, caffeine and alcohol close to bedtime.
- Allow yourself some quiet time to wind down and process the day. This could include listening to soft music, journaling, reading, pampering yourself or doing a hobby.
- Create a nurturing evening routine—this is helpful for adults as well as children.
- Try deep breathing or listening to a guided relaxation or meditation before bed.

**Dim the lights**

- Blue-light blocking eyewear is now widely available and can protect your eyes from the disruptive, short-wavelength blue light emitted from electronic devices.
- Other options include free, downloadable software such as the f.lux program, which adapts the light emitted from your electronic device screens to a level that’s appropriate for what time of day or night it is. [justgetflux.com](http://justgetflux.com)

**How’s your sleep?**

- If you suspect you might be suffering from a sleep disorder, start by discussing your symptoms and concerns with your primary care health provider to find out if a referral to a sleep specialist for a thorough sleep evaluation is necessary.
- Beware of apps, fitness trackers and home testing kits that claim to assess your sleep patterns. While these tools may provide you with useful information, such as how much time you actually spend lying in bed, they cannot screen, diagnose or treat sleep problems. A sleep lab is the only way to accurately measure whether a person is asleep, when they’re asleep, what stage of sleep they’re in and if they have a sleep disorder.
- For more sleep tips, resources and information, visit [sleepfoundation.org](http://sleepfoundation.org). 
Kids can tell us a lot about how we’re doing as a community.

With the goal of contributing to a unified approach to meeting the health needs of local children now and into the future, the Health District carried out the first-ever Larimer County Child Health Survey in 2014 with a grant from Kaiser Permanente Colorado.

Results from the survey will be used to help inform Larimer County Department of Public Health and Environment’s Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and will serve as a valuable local data source for other community partners including University of Colorado Health, Team Fort Collins and the Partnership for Healthy Youth Coalition.

“The survey was initiated by the Health District in part because we recognized that we were lacking some data about the health of children in our community,” says CHIP project manager Christy Bush. “We’re most interested in the survey’s measures that are related to mental health, nutrition and physical activity—and I’m very happy to see that we now have a larger sample size than the community has had in the past.”

The 36-question survey gathered information on children under the age of 14 in homes of people who responded to the Health District’s 2013 Community Health Survey and was completed by 336 parents.

Many of the results are positive, but anyone who works to improve the health of a community knows that their work is never truly done—not until 100 percent of kids are healthy, happy and safe.

A few interesting findings:

Ninety-five percent of respondents reported their child’s overall health as excellent/very good and 5 percent rated their child’s health as good. While this is great news, the survey also uncovered areas in need of improvement. For example, when asked how often it has been very hard to get by (i.e. cover basics like food and housing) on the family income since the child was born, 23 percent of respondents reported having difficulty somewhat or very often.

- Only 37% of our county’s kids are getting the recommended hour of physical activity per day. But, they’re eating well: 84% are eating more than two servings of fruit each day and 65% are eating more than two servings of vegetables each day.
- 7% of kids are drinking more than two sugar-sweetened beverages per day. The overall average amount of sugar-sweetened beverages respondents’ children consume is about half a beverage per day.
When plans for the new center began in 2011, an advisory council of survivors assembled around the table—elbow-to-elbow with physicians, nurses and administrators—to ensure that the patients coming after them would have access to the best possible care and support.

“When they spoke, we listened,” says JoAnn Lovins, senior director of oncology at the new center. “From concepts to actual design to picking out fabrics, they let us know what was most valuable to have—and there’s healing in that.”

The 30,000-square-foot, $11 million cancer center prioritizes treating the whole person with the most advanced care. It does so by providing access to treatment, research, and a variety of support and survivorship services under one roof.

“The average cancer patient has about 100 visits in their first year,” Lovins says. “Our goal is to bring that down to 60.”

A single appointment at the cancer center often involves meeting with a variety of specialists—from physicians, counselors and patient navigators to social workers, dietitians and financial advisors. This makes it possible for cancer patients to more efficiently receive the care they need, without extensive travel.

The cancer center’s lobby, a wrap-around design meant to evoke the feeling of a hug or a warm blanket, is bright, inviting and opens up to an outdoor healing garden. The radiation department houses two linear accelerators, deemed the world’s most advanced technology for delivering targeted radiation to cancer tumors.

The modern-looking infusion center is adorned with vibrant local artwork and stylish, glazed-glass sliding partitions that take the place of ominous hospital curtains. It provides patients with options including private and semi-private rooms, family-friendly rooms, heated chairs and comfortable community and outdoor spaces.

“Patients will sometimes have their physician visits on the outdoor patio facing the mountains and the trees,” Lovins says.

The center includes a robust team of clinical research professionals who work in close partnership with Colorado State University and University of Colorado Cancer Center in metro Denver. These collaborations allow patients to access promising clinical trials.

Physicians from the new cancer center will even travel to places like Estes Park and Laramie so that patients don’t have to come to Fort Collins for everything. “We want to get care as close to home as possible, safely,” Lovins says.

The real magic, however, happens in the center’s multidisciplinary room. Here, teams of physicians, specialists and other professionals assemble weekly to share their expertise and develop the best treatment plans for each patient. They can also teleconference with experts from around the world when tackling challenging cases, bringing everyone with something valuable to contribute together into one room.

Local lung cancer survivor Dona Ammons exemplifies the strategy’s success. After experiencing some chest pain, a mass was found in her lung. The next morning, UCHealth’s lung nodule team met to take a look at what was found and discuss the best course of action for her care. A simple treatment plan was decided upon and a little over two months later, her cancer was gone.

But reaching a cured state is not the end of a cancer patient’s journey. The final phase of the new cancer center, slated for completion in June, is a survivorship and wellness center. This will help patients who have completed treatment successfully integrate back into their lives and the community. Complete with an exercise gym, a demonstration/participation kitchen, rehab and physical therapy programs, support groups, and a conference center for community education workshops, the plan includes what survivors know future patients need to fully heal. And it has already succeeded in bringing many supportive local entities together. “When you listen to your patients,” Lovins says, “you can’t go wrong.”
Larimer Health Connect
Enrollment finishes strong; insurance assistance to continue

Larimer Health Connect helped 1,500 people find more affordable health insurance options during the most recent open enrollment period for the Connect for Health Colorado Marketplace that ended Feb. 15. It will continue to assist local residents with their health insurance needs through the year and during the next open enrollment period which begins Nov. 1.

A project of the Health District, Larimer Health Connect has provided free, in-person assistance at multiple Larimer County locations since October 2013. It offers information and enrollment help for Medicaid and Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+), as well as for private Connect for Health Colorado Marketplace plans that feature financial assistance to reduce the cost of health insurance and health care.

During the three-month enrollment period that ended in February, Health Coverage Guides served almost as many people through in-person visits and intensive phone assistance as they did during last year’s open enrollment period, which ran twice as long. As of Feb. 15, more than 10,000 Larimer County residents had enrolled in plans from the Connect for Health Colorado Marketplace, with even more signing up for newly expanded Medicaid benefits.

Consumers came from all over Larimer County and from all walks of life. They had this in common, however: they were uninsured, or seeking a more affordable health coverage option, and they needed help figuring out their options and navigating the enrollment process.

“Applying for health benefits seemed difficult to do on my own,” says one 25-year-old woman from Fort Collins. “Having in-person assistance helped me understand what I qualify for. And having benefits will save me hundreds of dollars each year in medical expenses—I am very grateful.”

Over the next several months, Larimer Health Connect will continue to assist people at its Old Town offices. With open enrollment over for now, those who are still uninsured can enroll in a Marketplace plan only if they have had a “life-change event.” This includes events such as marriage, divorce, the birth of a child or changing or losing a job (and with it your health insurance). Enrollment in Medicaid and CHP+ continues year-round, however, and Larimer Health Connect can help with that.

The next open enrollment period for the Marketplace runs Nov. 1 through Jan. 31, 2016, when Larimer Health Connect will again offer free assistance at multiple locations around the county.

Family Dental Clinic undergoes renovations to better serve patients

The Health District’s Family Dental Clinic has wrapped up a three-month renovation aimed at increasing its capacity and efficiency. The clinic now offers patients greater comfort and convenience. The project enlarged the space surrounding several dental chairs and increased capacity for dental hygiene procedures. The switch to electronic dental records also allowed the chart storage room to be converted to a patient check-out station for the front desk. Now patients have a separate, semi-private area for paying bills and scheduling new appointments at the end of their visit. The Family Dental Clinic provides a full range of dental services for adults and children with low incomes and either no dental insurance or coverage through Medicaid or Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+).
blood pressure checks

OFFERED MONTHLY!
Free, 5-10 minute walk-in blood pressure reading and consultation with a registered nurse.

The consultation includes discussion and materials on:
- What does blood pressure mean?
- How can I keep my blood pressure where it needs to be, lowering my risk of heart attack and stroke?
- What’s the right way to monitor my blood pressure?
- Follow-up suggestions.

Checks are the third Monday of each month, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree. No appointment necessary.

Visit healthdistrict.org/heart for more information.

cholesterol tests

Find out your total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, triglycerides and blood glucose numbers; learn what they mean and what to do about them.

Health District residents who have never received our test are eligible to receive their first test for free. Health District boundaries include Fort Collins, Laporte, Wellington, Red Feather Lakes, Livermore, Bellvue and Timnath.

Cost for all others is $15. Sliding fees available.

Cholesterol tests are 8:15-10:30 a.m. unless otherwise indicated.

Appointments strongly recommended; call (970) 224-5209. Walk-ins accepted only at specific sites, see schedule below. An 8-hour fast is recommended; water and medications are permitted.

Visit healthdistrict.org/heart for more information.

April
- Tues., April 7 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Tues., April 14 – Larimer County Courthouse offices, 200 W. Oak
- Thurs., April 16 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Tues., April 21 – Health District, 120 Bristlecone

May
- Tues., May 5 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Thurs., May 7 – Spirit of Joy Church, 4501 S. Lemay
- Tues., May 12 – Larimer County Courthouse offices, 200 W. Oak
- Tues., May 19 – Health District, 120 Bristlecone
- Thurs., May 21 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree

June
- Thurs., June 4 – Spirit of Joy Church, 4501 S. Lemay
- Tues., June 9 – Larimer County Courthouse offices, 200 W. Oak
- Thurs., June 11 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Tues., June 16 – Health District, 120 Bristlecone
- Thurs., June 18 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Tues., June 23 – Harmony Library, 4616 S. Shields

July
- Thurs., July 2 – Spirit of Joy Church, 4501 S. Lemay
- Tues., July 7 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Thurs., July 16 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Tues., July 21 – Health District, 120 Bristlecone
- Tues., July 28 – Harmony Library, 4616 S. Shields

thinking of quitting tobacco?

We can help!

Hundreds of Fort Collins residents have quit by using our Step Free from Tobacco program and YOU CAN, TOO!

Call today:
(970) 224-5209

INDIVIDUAL • BUDDY GROUP SESSIONS
- Free nicotine patches / gum / lozenges
- Free first session
- Positive, supportive approach
- Techniques that work
- Tailored to your individual needs
- Sliding fees for those who qualify

Upcoming Wednesday group classes:
- April 29 – June 3 (6 p.m.)
- June 24 – July 29 (6 p.m.)

Call in advance to register—space is limited! Please arrive 30 minutes early for the first session.

Dental Connections helps find dental services for adults in Larimer County who have no insurance and can’t afford care.

Even if you have modest income (up to $14/hr. for an individual), you may qualify for our sliding fees.

Call
(970) 493-3366
or visit healthdistrict.org/dental-connections to see if you qualify.