BenefitsPulse

Discover health and benefits news for city of Houston employees and retirees

Winter 2015

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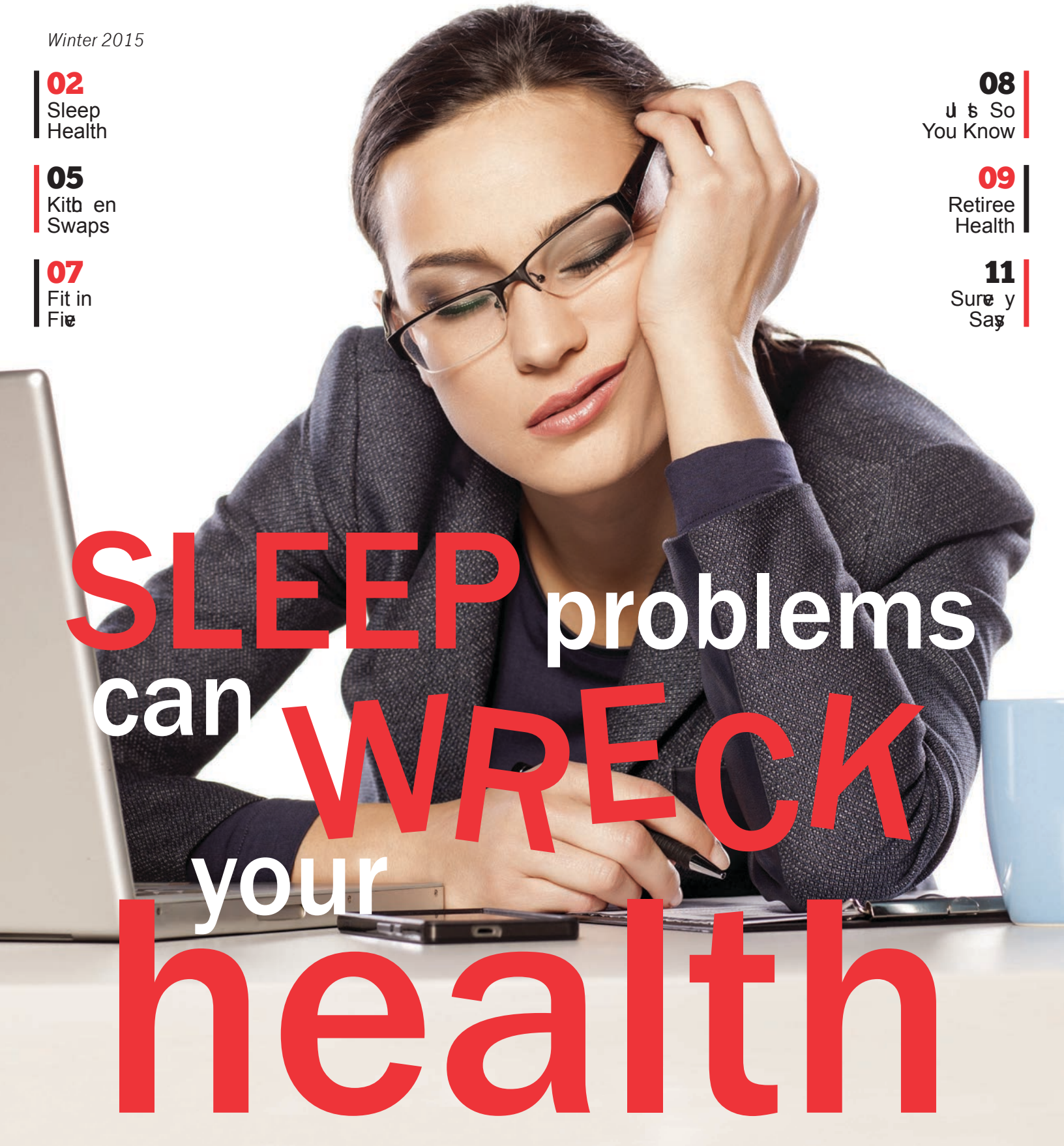

SLEEP problems can WRECK your health

From the Editor

David Smith

Wake up! Snap out of it! Look alive!

If people say this to you, or if you have to say it to yourself, chances are pretty good you aren't getting enough sleep.

Medical experts agree: sleep is vital to our health and performance. Drowsiness and sluggishness are symptoms that we are not getting ample sleep. On the flip side, sufficient sleep helps us feel rested, energetic, alert. Your body recharges during sleep, as internal organs and processes continue to function.

Some people know this already. They remind themselves while lying awake at night unable to sleep. Others have no clue why they feel tired throughout the day because they go to bed at a reasonable hour and fall asleep without much trouble. Insomnia and conditions such as sleep apnea are among the culprits that sabotoge your rest.

The solution is not more coffee throughout the day, more energy drinks, or ducking under your desk at work to grab a nap like George Costanza from the "Seinfeld" TV sitcom. Sleep specialists can diagnose and help with a remedy.

With sleep being so crucial to both mental and physical well-being, we thought we'd explore causes of and solutions for sleep problems in this issue of "Benefits Pulse." Paul Beckman's cover story beginning on Page 3 sheds some light the issues. We hope you'll be nodding in agreement, not nodding off — unless you desperately need the rest.

In this issue, we also explore ways retirees can stay fit and healthy, and we address employee responses to our Benefits survey. You spoke up and we listened.

On another note, I'd like to remind everyone that we are steadily moving closer to the March 31 deadline for active city employees to record wellness points. You must have accumulated at least 500 points by then to receive the $600 discount on your health plan contribution. Employees can record your points by logging into your account at mycigna.com or call a representative for help at 877-868-2002.

Good luck with your wellness points. And be sure to record them so that falling short of your goal doesn't cost you $600, or cause you any sleepless nights.

David Smith
Managing Editor

We want to know what's on your mind or what you would like to know more about. Please forward any story ideas for future issues of Benefits Pulse or comments about recent issues to David Smith at davidf.smith@houstontx.gov.

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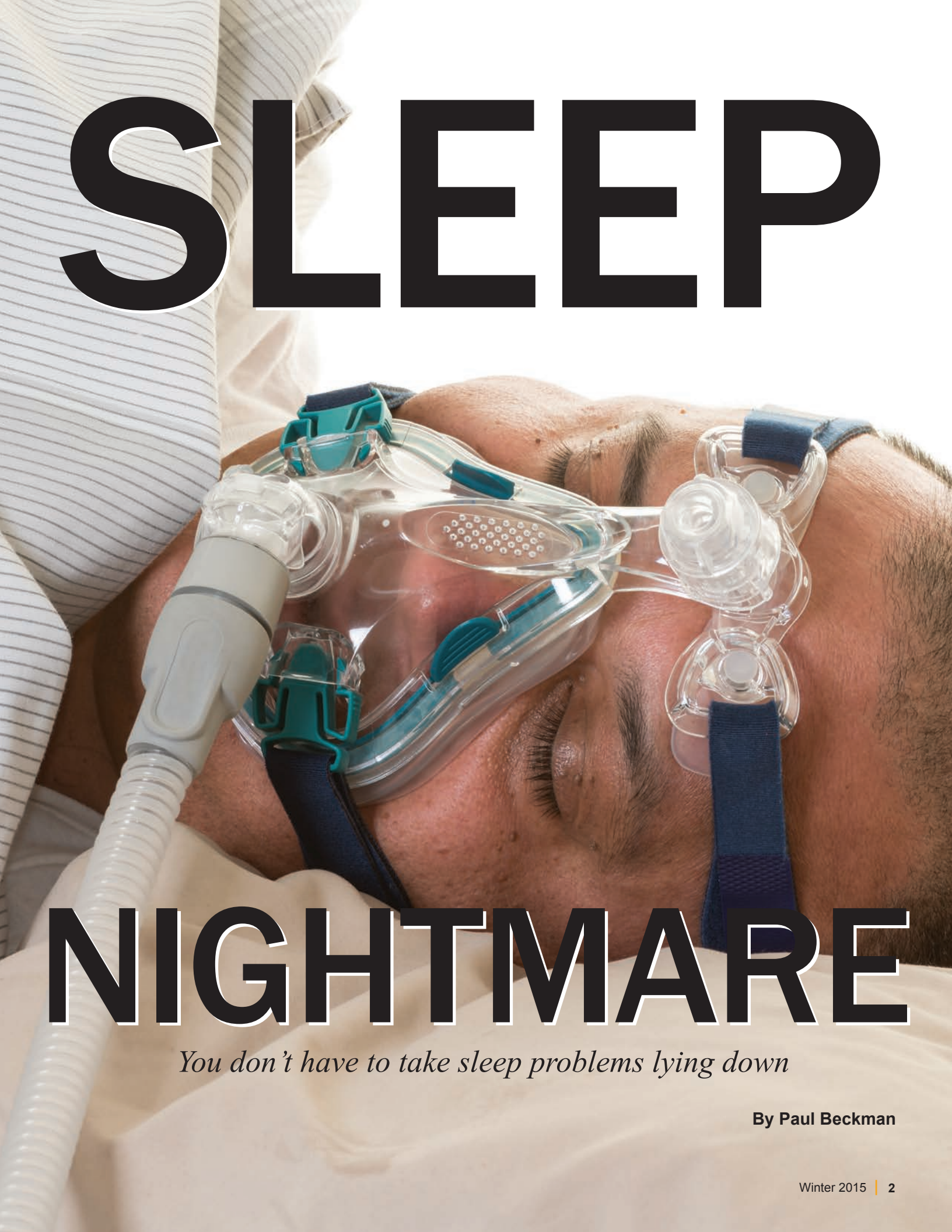
SLEEP NIGHTMARE



You don't have to take sleep problems lying down

By Paul Beckman

Americans are known for dreaming big. But nowadays dreams are getting harder to find – at least when sleep is the main ingredient.

Between 50-70 million Americans don't sleep enough, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And the widespread impact is dangerous enough for the CDC to call it a public health epidemic.

"Getting enough sleep is extremely important for your health and well-being," said Dr. Puneet Patni, a pulmonary disease and sleep medicine specialist at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic. "There's no doubt that your performance and physical condition are adversely affected if you don't get enough sleep. The vast majority of people need seven to eight hours of sleep."

But sleeping like a log isn't always as easy as falling off one.

Problems falling asleep, staying asleep and staying awake during the day are the biggest complaints Patni hears from patients.

That usually breaks down to the most common diagnoses: obstructive sleep apnea and insomnia.

"Those are definitely the two biggest problems," Patni said.

Choking the night away – obstructive sleep apnea

Sleep is a vital ingredient to good health. But every time Jay Stiteley dozed off, his body dealt with a nightmarish scenario.

Hundreds of times a night his breathing stopped. The pause could last a few seconds or drag to more than a minute, Stiteley said. Only waking up, often from sudden body jerks or acid reflux, restored his breathing.

More frightening to Stiteley was that he had no idea it was happening.

"My wife, Karen, noticed I was not breathing," said Stiteley, a Department of Neighborhoods division manager. "Once she mentioned it, I started realizing something was going on. But I never realized I stopped breathing."

A sleep study revealed he had obstructive sleep apnea, a common sleep disorder affecting about 20 million Americans. The condition causes throat muscles to close and halt airflow during sleep.

"The main problem is your airway is collapsed," Patni said. "So it's like someone put a hand over your face and they're choking you all night."

Patni said only some people with sleep apnea wake up throughout the night with the chilling feeling they are being choked. Others realize they wake up frequently and feel exhausted in the morning. Still others have no idea any of it is happening.

But drowsiness and exhaustion are just the start of the health problems caused by sleep apnea, Patni said. The condition, which can lead to shorter life expectancy, increases the risk for high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, abnormal heart rhythms and heart attacks.

"There's more and more data of other health problems now like diabetes and low testosterone," Patni said. "Not to mention the safety aspect. You don't want to fall asleep on the road and hurt yourself or someone else because you have untreated sleep apena."

Nightlong study session

Stiteley discovered the depth of his problem through a sleep study. (See sleep study box on Page 14.)

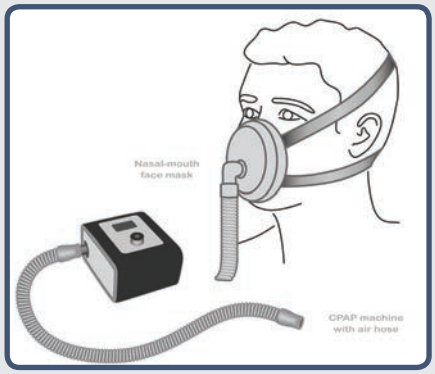
After hooking Stiteley up to monitors that record breathing, heart rate, snoring, limb movements and oxygen levels, technicians recorded the information and took notes.

About two hours after falling asleep, Stiteley awoke to see a technician standing by with a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure, or CPAP, mask. The mask increases air pressure in the throat so airflow isn't obstructed. (See types of CPAP masks on Page 4.)

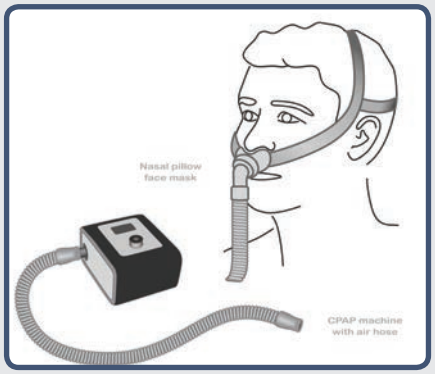
"In just two and a half hours of sleep, they already figured out I was averaging 48 and a half episodes an hour," Stiteley said. "At that point my oxygen level in my blood stream had dropped to 58 percent. It was causing me very interrupted sleep."

But Stiteley said sleeping the rest of the night with the CPAP mask changed everything.

Types of CPAP masks



Full mask



Nose pillows

"I felt more refreshed in that four and a half hours of sleep because I never woke up the whole time," he said. "I felt more refreshed than a lot of nights when I might have been thinking I was getting seven or eight hours of sleep.

"If a family member indicates to you that they have a concern about your sleep, don't get hung up that it's about your snoring," Stiteley said. "Listen to them. It's your health. You're not getting quality sleep. You're putting yourself at risk for developing more injurious types of conditions. It's just one night. Go check it out."

Risk factors for all ages

The risk factors for sleep apnea include the usual suspects: smoking, excess weight and age. (See risk factors box at right.)

But just because many of the risk factors don't match up to the person doesn't mean sleep apnea can't lurk in their bedrooms. Christopher Peirsol, a Public Works and Engineering Department electrician, sidestepped many of the risk factors.

"I am not your typical candidate, according to [doctors]," Peirsol said. "I don't drink, smoke, and I'm not overweight."

Still, crippling migraines led him to seek help. He was diagnosed with sleep apnea and now sleeps soundly with a CPAP mask.

A visit to a doctor is the only real way to ensure a correct diagnosis. But some signs, like constant snoring and feeling tired after sleeping all night could be tipoffs to a bigger, underlying problem.

"A lot of people snore," Patni said. "And snoring itself has never been shown to have any negative physiological effect on the snorer. It has a negative effect on the other person in the bed."

Still, snoring is not always innocent, Patni said. When people are awakened frequently by their own snoring, it's a good idea to get it checked by a doctor.

"Also, snoring could be suggestive of sleep apnea when people are hearing it from another room or across the house and complaining about it nonstop," Patni said.

Even children can have sleep apnea. A child's loud and consistent snoring could be a sign. And the toll of restless sleep is different in children than adults.

"For kids, hyperactivity can be one of the symptoms for sleep apnea," Patni said.

Sleep Nighmare *continued on Page 13*

Sleep apnea risk factors

Excess Weight : More likely to have sleep apnea, but not everyone with sleep apnea is overweight.

Smoking : Smokers are three times more likely to have obstructive sleep apnea than people who have never smoked. Yet another reason to not smoke.

Thicker neck circumference : A thicker neck may mean you have a narrower airway.

A narrowed airway : You can thank genes for this Some people inherit a naturally narrow throat or have enlarged tonsils or adenoids

Being male : Sorry dudes, you're twice as likely to have sleep apnea. But women aren't getting off scot-free. Their risk increases if they're overweight and also seems to rise after menopause.

Being older : You may be wiser, but you're also more likely to have sleep apnea. It occurs significantly more often in adults older than 60.

Family history : If you have family members with sleep apnea, you may be next.

Race : In people younger than 35, African-Americans are more likely to have obstructive sleep apnea.

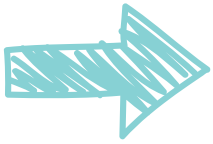
Use of alcohol, sedatives or tranquilizers : These substances may relax you, but they also may relax the muscles in your throat.

Nasal congestion : Difficulty breathing through your nose, whether it's from an anatomical problem or allergies, means you're more likely to develop obstructive sleep apnea.

Source: Mayo Clinic

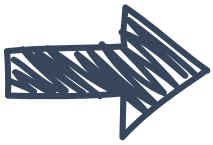
kitchen swaps to try

Sour Cream



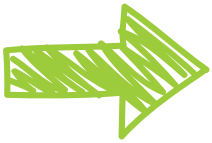
Plain Greek Yogurt

White Rice



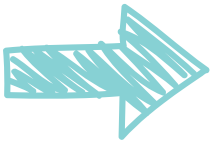
Quinoa

Bread Crumbs



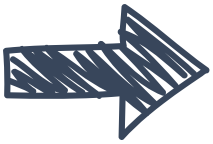
Rolled Oats

Fruit Juice



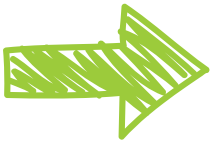
Fruit Water

White Flour



Almond Flour

Butter



Coconut Oil

Muesli Breakfast Bars

Ingredients

2 1/2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
1/2 cup soy flour
1/2 cup fat-free dry milk
1/2 cup toasted wheat germ
1/2 cup sliced (flaked) almonds or chopped pecans, toasted
1/2 cup dried apples, chopped
1/2 cup raisins
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup dark honey
1/2 cup natural unsalted peanut butter
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Serving size: 1 bar; Calories 177; Total fat 5 g; Total carbohydrate 27 g; Dietary fiber 3 g; Sodium 75 mg; Saturated fat 1 g; Trans fat 0 g; Cholesterol 1 mg; Protein 6 g; Monounsaturated fat 2 g; Sugars 11 g

The original breakfast cereal called muesli — a German word meaning "mixture" — combined rolled oats with nuts and fruit. The bars here are perfect for breakfast on the go or for a healthy snack anytime.

Directions

Preheat the oven to 325 F. Lightly coat a 9-by-13-inch baking pan with olive oil cooking spray.

In a large bowl, combine the oats, flour, dry milk, wheat germ, almonds, apples, raisins and salt. Stir well to blend and set aside.

In a small saucepan, stir together the honey, peanut butter and olive oil over medium-low heat until well blended. Don't let the mixture boil. Stir in the vanilla. Add the warm honey mixture to the dry ingredients and stir quickly until well combined. The mixture should be sticky but not wet.

Pat the mixture evenly into the prepared baking pan. Press firmly to remove any air pockets. Bake just until the edges begin to brown, about 25 minutes. Let cool in the pan on a wire rack for 10 minutes, and then cut into 24 bars. When just cool enough to handle, remove the bars from the pan and place them on the rack to cool completely. Store the bars in airtight containers in the refrigerator.

Cook's Tip

Ingredient note: Mix it up and make it your own. Try swapping the apples for cranberries, apricots or any dried fruit. Change out the nuts or use almond flour instead of soy. Toss in flax, chia or hemp seeds or even a scoop of protein powder.

Source: Mayo Clinic

Pink in the City

In observance of Breast Cancer Awareness month in October, the Wellness team asked employees to wear pink and decorate their offices for Pink in the City. Employees from departments across the city participated and posted their pink head photos to the COH Employee News Facebook group.

facebook.com/groups/COHEmployeeNews/

fit in five

Videos help you sit less, move more

By Elise Rambaud Marrion

Multiple medical studies warn about the dangers of sitting too much throughout the day. Even stepping away from the desk for five minutes an hour can be good for you.

Some of the health risks of a sedentary lifestyle are cardiovascular disease, obesity and conditions that include increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, excess body fat around the waist and abnormal cholesterol levels. A recent Mayo Clinic study suggests that too much sitting also increases the risk of cancer.

To encourage city employees to move more during the work day, Cigna and HTV developed a series of exercise videos, "Fit in Five," that can be done in your workspace and on your breaks.

If you already have a fitness routine, this 30-minute video can infuse some extra energy into your workday. For employees who need a motivation to excercise, these videos are a good place to start. And if anybody gives you the side-eye, just say you are earning your wellness points.

"One of the biggest challenges to starting an exercise program is time. The 'Fit in Five' exercises can be done easily in short segments throughout the day at someone's desk," said Paula McHam, a Cigna account executive. "In addition to individual use, the 'Fit in Five' videos are a great way to get a group together for a healthy break at work."

Cigna introduced the video series at a "red-carpet, night club" themed event at the House of Dereon in November. Cigna leaders and Councilman Dwight Boykins greeted the guests who were clad in workout gear. Guests got their hearts pumping and bodies moving to the dance routines of Night Club Cardio.

The wellness team has free flash drives with the videos, or watch it on YouTube by using your smart phone's bar code app to read this code.

It PAYS to IMPROVE

FOR ALL THE WAYS TO GET POINTS
VISIT
houstonwellnessconnection.org

POINT COLLECTION DEADLINE IS
MARCH 31, 2015

DiscoverHealth with the Wellness Connection

HOW TO EARN POINTS #17

Participate in a charity walk/run/bike (5k minimum)	
Points	25
Max	125
Frequency	5
Reporting	MyCigna.com

just so you know

Add newborns and new dependents to benefits plan within 31 days

New dependents, including newborns, must be added to your benefits plan within 31 days of birth. Go to the ESS website at https://portal.houstontx.gov to add your newborn. Complete the fax cover letter and fax along with the Certified Birth Certificate or Verification of Birth Facts to 832-393-7213. If you do not add your newborn and provide the supporting document within 31 days, you will have to wait until next year's annual enrollment to enroll your child.

Don't miss out on Medicare aid for end-stage renal disease coverage

Depending on the type of treatment, if you have been treated for end-stage renal disease for at least three months, you may be eligible for Medicare and should apply for it. Your dialysis center can inform you about the need to apply for Medicare. During the first 30 months of being on Medicare with ESRD, Cigna is the primary payer of your medical claims and Medicare is the secondary payer. After 30 months, Medicare becomes primary and Cigna secondary. If you do not enroll in Medicare, Cigna will only pay as the secondary payer, and you will be responsible for the portion that Medicare would have paid if you were enrolled. January through March is the annual enrollment for Medicare with coverage becoming effective July 1.

Weight-loss success depends on realistic goals, consistent effort

If you have a significant amount of weight to lose, it may be too discouraging to think about doing it all at once. Rather than focusing on a number, try focusing on making and sustaining healthy lifestyle changes.

For example, set a goal to exercise three times a week. And be realistic about how much weight you can lose how quickly. Aim for an attainable weight loss of 1 to 2 pounds (0.5 to 1 kilogram) a week.

Source: Mayo Clinic

Reducing excess drink calories can be a fluid situation

When it comes to weight loss, all calories count. If you're drinking too many calories, look for easy ways to scale back: 1. Switch to low-fat or fat-free milk. 2. Choose water instead of juices and sodas. 3. Perk up plain water with a splash of juice or a twist of lemon or lime. 4. Trade alcoholic drinks for sparkling water.

Source: Mayo Clinic

Getting sick when traveling doesn't have to be a headache

Some medical experts suggest seeing a health care provider to get any vaccines, medicines and advice you need before going on a trip. Going to a doctor at least four to six weeks before you travel gives vaccines time to take effect, and you have plenty of time to get vaccines that require more than one dose.

If you are visiting several countries or countries with a variety of health risks, or if you have a pre-existing health condition, you may need to see a clinician who specializes in travel medicine. Also, if you become ill while traveling, two professional medical organizations provide directories of travel clinics in the United States:

The International Society of Travel Medicine (*istm.org/AF_CstmClinicDirectory.asp*);

The American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene (*astmh.org/source/ClinicalDirectory/*).

Source: Centers for Disease Control

facebook.com/groups/COHEmployeeNews/

twitter.com/COHEmployeeNews

Staying fit & healthy as you age

By Lucha Morales

While there's no magic pill to stop the aging process, eating a heart-healthy diet and exercising your mind and body can help you cope with the changes aging brings to your body. Use these tips to be proactive about your health and manage five common aging problems:

Hypertension. Stiffening arteries make your heart work harder to pump blood, increasing your risk for hypertension. To reduce your risk, practice heart-healthy habits throughout your life. Get regular exercise, eat a heart-healthy diet, don't smoke and practice relaxation techniques to reduce stress.

Brittle bones and stiff joints. Aging drains minerals and calcium from your bones making them more likely to fracture. As you lose fluids around your joints, they can stiffen and cartilage can rub together and begin to break down. To promote joint and bone health, talk to your doctor about taking Vitamin D and calcium supplements. To strengthen muscles around joints and improve flexibility, begin a regular strength training regimen with weights. But before lifting weights for the first time, get your doctor's approval and ask about using a trainer.

Memory loss. Myelin, a nerve sheath that helps improve your thinking process can break down with age. Because of this, recalling memories can take longer. Stop focusing on what you can't remember. Instead, adopt strategies to help you remember. For example, if you tend to forget names, try linking them to something you are familiar with. To retain new information, try linking it with the way it makes you feel, how it smells, or how it sounds.

Hearing and vision. One out of three people ages 65 to 74 has some level of hearing loss, according to WebMD. That loss can be attributed to genes, exposure to loud noises, smoking, and in some instances diabetes and medications.

You can't reverse hearing loss, but you can manage it. Get regular screenings to ensure no other medical conditions are causing your hearing loss. And speak with your doctor about assisted hearing devices.

Also know this: The quality of your vision will change as you age. Changes in color perception and focus are two common problems. Cataracts, glaucoma, and retinal disorders should be treated. Get an annual vision exam. Protective lenses can limit your exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays and reduce your risk of injury when working with tools.

Balance. Changes in vision and muscle and joint strength contribute to falls. Degeneration of your vestibular sensory system, the tiny inner ear sensory tubes that are filled with fluid and help keep your balance, can also cause dizziness and lead to problems with balance. But a healthy diet, regular doctor visits, and creating safe walking environments can help prevent falls. If you experience constant dizziness, you need to seek medical attention immediately. You could be developing vertigo or experiencing low blood sugar, cardiac nervous system or inner ear problems.

Retiree *Health Notes*

Don't let stress make you sick

Scientists have long known that stress complicates a host of health problems. Now they are discovering that chronic stress — sometimes a mainstay of modern life — doesn't merely increase the effects of disease, it can cause it.

"We are just beginning to understand the ways that stress influences a wide range of diseases of aging, including heart disease, metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes and certain types of disability, even early death," says Sheldon Cohen, a professor of psychology at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh who has been at the forefront of stress research for 30 years.

Everyone experiences stress, of course, but it's particularly prevalent among adults over 50. In a recent Harvard University-Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-NPR poll, about 25 percent of 2,500 participants said they'd experienced a great deal of stress in the past month. Another poll, conducted in August by AARP, found 37 percent of adults over 50 experienced a major stressful life event in the past year, such as the death of a family member, chronic illness or a job loss.

Certainly, many people who are stressed end up eating, drinking and smoking more, and sleeping and exercising less — tendencies that have obvious negative consequences for our health. But scientists are discovering a much more nuanced picture, according to Bruce McEwen, a neuroscientist at Rockefeller University in New York. But one of the most alarming hazards is the release of cortisol, generally considered a bad stress hormone.

Among the conditions that may be caused by stress are the common cold; weight gain; slower healing; sleep dysfunction; heart disease; depression; ulcers and other stomach problems; back, neck and shoulder pain.

Source: AARP

Vaccines to Get Now

Want to stay healthy this year? You may need more than a flu shot. This handy vaccine chart is a good place to start.

	Protects against?	Who needs the shot?	How often?	Any other concerns?
Influenza (inactivated)	Seasonal flu, transmitted by close contact with someone infected.	Everyone. Flu can make those 65 and over much sicker than others	Annually, usually in early fall. Needs two weeks to take effect.	Consult a doctor if you've ever had a severe allergic reaction.
Tdap	Tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough)	Everyone. If you did not get it at age 11 or 12, get it immediately.	One. Follow up with a Td booster every 10 years	One in 250 adults get a fever from a vaccine; some get upset stomach.
Td	Tetanus and diphtheria	Td is a booster for Tdap.	Every 10 years. Anyone severely wounded or burned may need it sooner.	Consult a doctor if you've ever has a severe reaction to the Tdap vaccine.
Zoster (shingles)	Herpes zoster, or shingles, a painful rash that comes from chicken pox virus	Adults age 60 and older who have had chicken pox	One, even if you've already had shingles	Consult a doctor if you've ever had a severe allergic reaction.
Hepatitis B	The hepatitis B virus, which affects the liver and can cause liver cancer.	People with multiple sex partners, those under age 60 with diabetes	Three doses required, to be given according to a specific schedule.	Hold off on vaccine if you are moderately or severely ill.
PCV13 (pneumonia)	The 13 strains that cause about half of pneumonia infections in adults	Anyone who has not had it by age 65; those with weak immune systems	One, followed by a PPSV23 vaccine 6 to 12 months later.	Consult a doctor if you've ever had a severe allergic reaction.
PPSV23 (pneumonia)	23 types of pneumonia bacteria, plus meningitis and blood infection.	Everyone age 65 and older; smokers; those with asthma or diabetes	Usually just one, but a second dose 5 years later may be necessary.	PPSV23 should be given 6 to 12 months after PCV13 for most people.

Source: AARP

survey says:

Benefits responds to survey comments

By Elise Rambaud Marrion

In July and August, Cigna and the City of Houston's Benefits division asked all city employees with health care coverage to complete an online survey about their level of satisfaction with customer services, the network of doctors and hospitals, claim handling and specific experiences with Cigna and the city's benefits team.

This was the first survey conducted since 2012 and 1,138 employees responded. Employees were also given the opportunity to write in comments and questions.

You asked, and we are listening. Based on your comments, let us show how we have introduced some new initiatives to enhance customer service. Here are some sample anonymous comments from employees and a response from Benefits:

YOU Comment:

"It will help the employees if a couple of employees from the benefits team visit each department at least every six months. This will help employees who have questions regarding their medical, dental and vision insurance coverage."

US Response:

To address this challenge, new on-site health benefits educator Tracy Edwards will rotate among departments to help employees understand the medical and pharmacy benefit plans provided by Cigna. (Read more about Edwards in our sidebar profile on Page 12.)

Margaret Baptiste, a veteran of the Benefits division, will serve as a health benefits educator for the City. She will visit with employees on-site and answer questions about other benefits such as life insurance, vision, dental and supplemental insurance.

YOU Comment:

"We receive too many emails and broadcast messages. Most of those either get deleted or overlooked because they are so frequent."

And an opposing comment …

"Be a little better at explaining the wellness program that allows us to have a reduction in cost of health care. It took me six months to find out that I had the insurance that was eligible, and by that time it was too late to get my biometric screening turned in."

US Response:

The city's wellness program is among the most robust and effective in the nation, and Human Resources' wellness team has been recognized for its success. By focusing on preventive care and encouraging employees to know their numbers and take charge of their health, the city has seen a reduction in claims for

catastrophic and chronic conditions. The health assessment data collected is a valuable tool that gives Cigna and the city a holistic view of employee health. It enables the wellness team to tailor specific educational programs for employees, and the city can even offer zero-copay prescription drug benefits based on the concentration of specific health conditions.

For example, when the biometric screenings and health assessment revealed a prevalence of high cholesterol among employees, the city began providing free mail-order generic cholesterol medications to employees. The prevalence of diabetes among employees also caused the city to provide free mail-order generic diabetes medication.

There is a persistent approach to wellness communications aimed at reaching as many employees as possible and encouraging the highest level of participation. Last year, 89 percent of employees who were enrolled in a city health plan completed the health assessment and earned the requisite 500 points and discount on their health plan contribution. For every employee who would prefer fewer calls, emails, post cards, posters, social media posts, another employee claims they didn't know about the health assessment or the points deadline.

YOU Comment:

"The benefits team does not return phone calls. The only way to get assistance is to physically walk into their office."

US Response:

This survey was taken before the Benefits division introduced a new interactive calling system. By calling one centralized number, 832-393-6000, employees are now directed to the desired service, such as retirees, active employees, pension, wellness, and others. The new system has streamlined the customer service process, drastically reducing the number of walk-in visits and connecting callers with the right person as soon as possible. Also, representatives are committed to returning calls within 24 hours. For ongoing issues, the new system allows different representatives to access someone's information from a previous call, instead of the caller having to repeat or re-explain the situation to someone new. The benefits administration service center is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

YOU Comment:

"Do not call me at home to discuss my health. That is not your business. It is my doctor's. You just keep running the business end in a satisfactory manner and leave medical advice to the experts."

US Response:

This comment refers to Cigna's health coaching calls, which are separate from the wellness program. Health coaching calls are triggered by health risk issues diagnosed or treated by your doctor. Cigna's medical experts — nurses, nutritionists, and other specialists — will call to offer additional support and advice to help you manage chronic conditions and make health changes such as weight loss or smoking cessation. Plan members can choose to discontinue health coaching calls, but you can also think of this as chance to ask questions of a health professional who is familiar with your condition without the need to make an appointment and pay a copay. By participating in the health coaching calls, you can earn up to 200 Wellness points.

Meet Tracy Edwards, your new health benefits educator

Open enrollment is an annual challenge for employees comparing the maze of premiums, copays and prescription benefits. Health benefits can be confusing.

So this year, Cigna added a new line of defense in customer service: Tracy Edwards. She's the new Cigna onsite health benefits educator for the city.

"My role will be to be mostly in the field, going out to employees and rotating among different departments to offer benefits education through one-on-one and group sessions," she said.

Edwards is here to help employees understand medical and pharmacy benefit plans provided by Cigna so they can make educated healthcare decisions for themselves and their families.

Edwards has a master's in business administration and has advocated in the nonprofit and government sectors for more than 10 years. She has worked in health and wellness education and outreach for more than five years.

"I used to be a juvenile probation officer and worked for Child Protective Services in New York and in Texas, so I understand working with frustrated people," she said. "Even if you come to me on your worst day, I understand the need for people to get that frustration out. You just want someone to hear your story. I'll let you vent, but in order for me to help you, you need to have an open mind. Then I can walk you through the steps to resolve your issue."

In the next edition, you will learn more about Margaret Baptiste, the city's health benefits educator.

Benefits Contacts

Medical and Dental

City of Houston Benefits Division
832-393-6000 • 888-205-9266

Cigna in City Benefits Division
832-393-6191 • 832-393-6193
832-393-6192 • 832-393-6194

Cigna 24/7 Customer Service
800-997-1406 | *mycigna.com*

United Healthcare (Dental)
866-605-2599
DHMO: *yourdentalplan.com/npd*
Indemnity *myuhcdental.com*

Superior Vision
800-507-3800
superiorvision.com

EAP
855-378-7485 • 800-687-0353
guidanceresources.com
web ID HOUSTONEAP

Medicare Advantage

Aetna
800-307-4830
aetnamedicare.com

KelseyCare Advantage
866-534-0554
kelseycareadvantage.com

Cigna HealthSpring
800-846-2098
texashealthspring.com

TexanPlus
866-556-4614

Medicare supplement plan F
800-392-7537

United MedicareRX
888-556-6648
uhc.com

Retirement

Empower Retirement
713-426-5588 • 800-701-8255

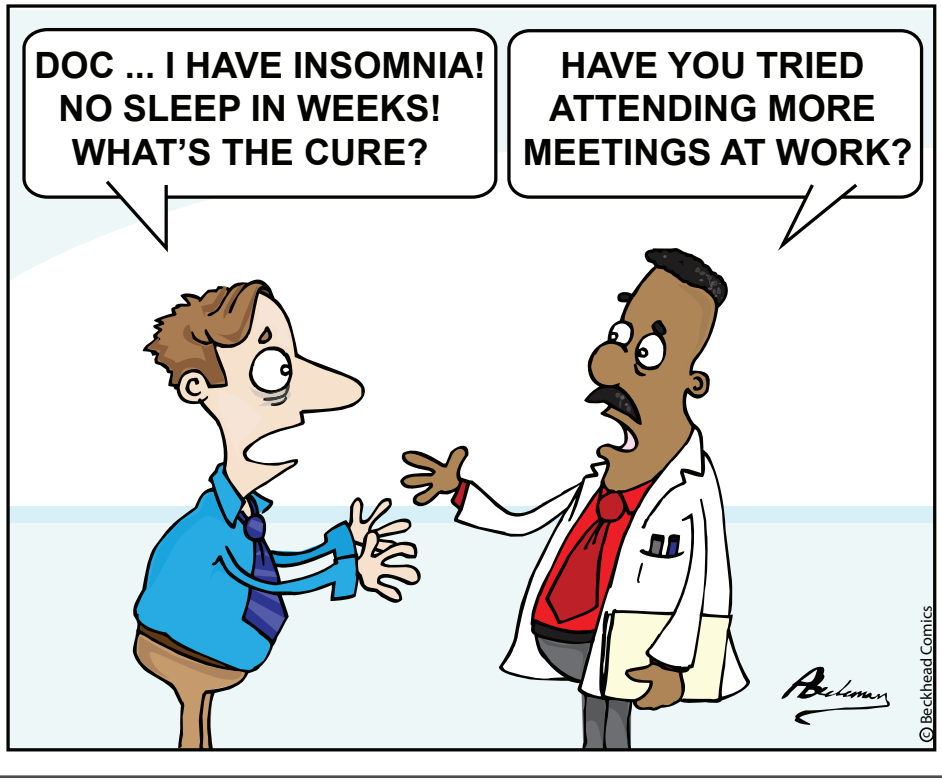
Municipal Pension (Pension and DROP)
713-759-9275

Fire Pension (Pension and DROP)
281-372-5100

Police Pension (Pension and DROP)
713-869-8734

The city of Houston reserves the right to change, modify, increase or terminate any benefits.

Drawing Conclusions *by Paul Beckman*



Sleep Nighmare *continued from page 4*

So before treating a child for ADHD, Patni suggested a pediatrician screen for sleep apnea. Childhood obesity and large tonsils often contribute to the disorder in children.

Eyes wide open — insomnia

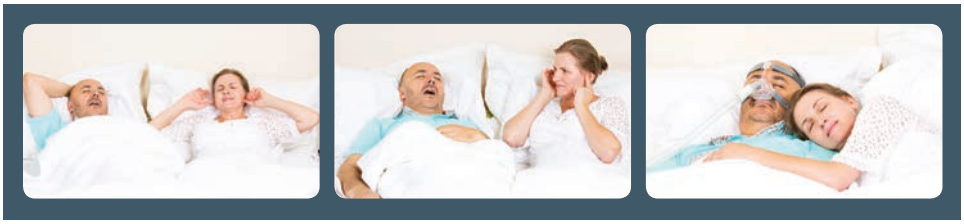
If you can't fall asleep, being awake becomes the nightmare. An inability to sleep or stay asleep has touched nearly everyone at some time, Patni said. But many people have insomnia that goes on for years.

The reasons behind the disorder can vary, Patni said. Medical illnesses, like chronic pain syndromes and breathing difficulties keep people up and miserable, as do restless leg syndrome and congestive heart failure.

Another cause is psychophysiological, where depression or anxiety take hold and won't allow a person to sleep.

"Often, there has been some sort of life stressor in the past — a divorce or loss of a job — during which you're having trouble sleeping," Patni said. "But as that event fades, typically your depression should go away."

But when it doesn't, some action is needed. Some problems may require counseling; others could be treated with medication, Patni said. Discussing this with a doctor will determine the best path.



Sleep Study Steps include

A doctor may recommend a sleep study for patients with sleeps disorders. During the study, the patient stays at a sleep lab overnight and sleeps in a room that resembles a hotel room. Monitored remotely by equipment and technicians, patients can be evaluated for sleep disorders like sleep apnea, narcolepsy, hypersomnia, pediatric sleep conditions and others.

"It's a little scary for some people," said Jorge Rey, a sleep technician at the Kelsey-Seybold Clinic sleep lab. "You have to remember you're stepping out of your comfort zone. But you shouldn't be nervous because you're being monitored by a certified technician who is going to help you."

The patient b eks in. Be s re to bring y ur ID and ins rane card. A teb nic an giv s the patient a tour of the s eeping room. The patient a n als try on a CPAP mab ine in a e it's needed during the night.

The patient is es rted bak to the s eep room. Sleep time! The patient goes to bed. Reo rding equipment s arts The teb nic an leav s the room.

The patient goes to the hook up room. A teb nic an attab es elec rodes to the body to reo rd func ions The body areas inc ude:

- Legs – b eks for limb mov ment disorders
- Ches and abdomen – monitors breathing efforts and heart
- Nek – b eks for s oring
- Head/fae – b eks s if patient grinds teeth and records the stages of sleep

The teb nic an attab es an elec rode to the patient's finger to monitor pulse and oxygen lev ls during the night.

The teb nic an monitors the patient remotely throughout the night and tak s notes The patient awak s the nek morning. The elec rodes are remov d and the patient b eks out.

Learn more at cohemployeenews.com

scan for video

Resources and insurance coverage

Being a Cigna health ins rane c s omer giv s y u ae s to many of the s riv e s, dev e s and res ure s that a n help y u s eep better.

The City of Hous on Cigna plans o er:

- **Sleep lab study**
- **Office consultation**
- **CPAP machine**
- **Replacement parts for CPAP machine**

Be sure to check your plan for specific coverage details.

In addition, y ur Cigna plan giv s y u ae s to a pers nal health adv a te team. An adv a te offers free adv e and s rategies for improv ng the quality of y ur s eep and other health topis

Cigna als has a s x week program for c ty emplo e es to ree iv week y s eep tips and information by email. To o ntac the pers nal health adv a te team, a ll 800-997-1406 and s lec option 2.

BenefitsPulse

City of Houston
Human Resources Department
611 Walker, 4-A
Houston, TX 77002

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Houston TX
Permit NO. 5113

Get Benefits Pulse in your personal inbox.
Sign up today at *benefitspulse.org*

WHEN TO GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM

City employees - know where to go

Urgent

A condition that requires immediate care but is not life-threatening

Common pain
Earache
Cold and flu
Abdominal pain
Sore throat
Minor cuts requiring stitches
Minor burns
Urinary tract infection
Asthma attacks
Rash without fever
Simple fractures and sprains

or

Emergency

A condition that is life- or limb-threatening

Chest pain
Loss of consciousness
Head and eye injuries
Severe bleeding
Difficulty breathing
Sudden loss of vision or blurred vision
Rash with fever
Major fracture

	Cigna Limited Network	Cigna Open Access	CDHP In-network
Emergency Room	No charge after $300 per visit copayment (copayment waived if admitted)	You pay 30%. Plan pays 70% after the deductible is met.	You pay 20%. Plan pays 80% after the deductible is met.
Urgent Care	You pay $60 copayment per visit (copayment waived if admitted)	You pay a $75 facility fee plus 30% for professional services after the deductible is met.	You pay 20%. Plan pays 80% after the deductible is met.

For a complete list of urgent care clinics visit mycigna.com or call 800-997-1406.