



The Aorta  
Reporter



## Sleep and the senior years: what actually helps

If you are sleeping less than you used to, you are not alone and you are not necessarily doing anything wrong.

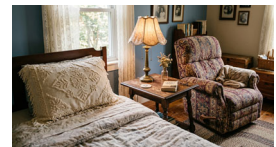
According to the National Institute on Aging, sleep changes with age in predictable, biological ways. The deep sleep phases that restore the body become shorter. The internal clock shifts earlier, so seniors tend to feel tired sooner in the evening and wake earlier in the morning. Sleep becomes lighter and more fragmented.

These are normal changes, not signs of disease. The challenge is that the body still needs roughly the same amount of sleep it always did, around seven to eight hours, according to the National Sleep Foundation. The need doesn't shrink, but the ability to get there does.

What helps may surprise you. Research published in Scientific Reports found that physical activity and social engagement each improve sleep quality in older adults. The key finding is that both are needed. High activity levels with low social contact, or a rich social life without physical movement, produced weaker results. The combination is what works.

According to research from the NIH, social isolation is one of the strongest predictors of fragmented, poor-quality sleep in seniors.

The practical takeaway is that seniors who sleep best tend to be those moving bodies, and staying connected. Worrying about sleep is among the least effective ways to get more of it.



## Meme, Couch Potato turn 50 in 2026

"Couch potato" was coined on July 15, 1976, when Tom Lacino, a member of the tongue-in-cheek California group the Boob Tubers, called his friend, cartoonist Robert Armstrong, and asked Armstrong's girlfriend, "Hey, is the couch potato there?"

Then there's the word "meme" — not born on the internet, but in Richard Dawkins' 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, where he defined it as a unit of cultural transmission, like a gene but for ideas. Dawkins shortened it from the Greek *mimeme*, meaning "imitated thing." Fifty years later, it mostly means a cat with a caption. (Source: Mental Floss)





### A cure for sickle cell? Science says yes

For the estimated 100,000 Americans living with sickle cell disease, June's awareness month arrives with news that would have seemed like science fiction just a decade ago: a functional cure now exists.

Sickle cell disease is a hereditary blood disorder in which red blood cells take on an abnormal crescent shape, clumping together and blocking blood flow. The result is episodes of severe pain, organ damage, stroke, and a significantly shortened lifespan. Until recently, the only cure was a bone marrow transplant — a risky procedure that requires a matched donor and is unavailable to most patients.

That changed in late 2023 when the FDA approved two landmark gene therapies: Casgevy, developed by Vertex Pharmaceuticals, and Lyfgenia from bluebird bio. Casgevy made history as the first treatment ever approved using CRISPR gene-editing technology — the molecular "scissors" that can precisely rewrite a patient's own DNA. Both therapies work by collecting a patient's stem cells, genetically correcting them in a laboratory, and reinfusing them. The repaired cells then produce healthy red blood cells.

## Home Buying Key

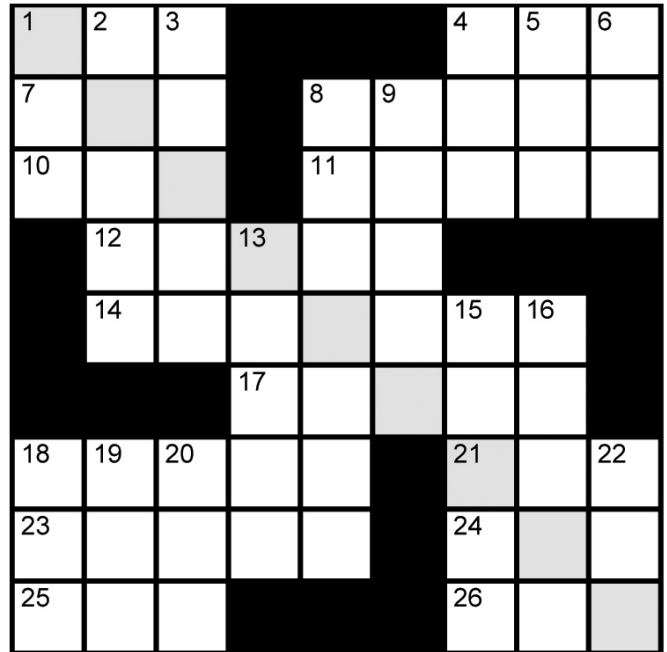
The headline is a clue to the answer in the diagonal.

### Across

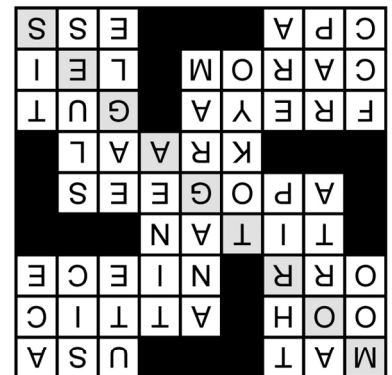
- 1. "Welcome" site
- 4. \_\_\_ Today
- 7. "\_\_\_ la la!"
- 8. Heirloom location
- 10. Bruin legend Bobby
- 11. Bridget Fonda, to Jane
- 12. Colossus
- 14. Highest points
- 17. A pen for livestock in southern Africa
- 18. Norse goddess of love
- 21. Kind of feeling
- 23. Billiards bounce
- 24. "Fantasy Island" prop
- 25. Number cruncher, for short
- 26. Feminine suffix

### Down

- 1. Jersey call
- 2. Blood carrier
- 3. Thunderflies
- 4. Colorado Indian
- 5. As written
- 6. Trick taker, often
- 8. Type of word play
- 9. Skin problem
- 13. \_\_\_ Rose



- 15. American symbol
- 16. Veers
- 18. TV monitor?
- 19. Bad-mouth
- 20. Baseball stat
- 22. "\_\_\_ the season ..."



Clinical results have been striking. In trials, the majority of patients treated with Casgevy experienced no severe pain crises for at least a year after treatment. Vertex recently announced the therapy is showing equally promising results in children as young as five.

Now for the gasp: Casgevy carries a list price of \$2.2 million for a single course of treatment. Lyfgenia comes in at \$3.1 million.

The federal government is working on it. In 2025, CMS launched a program in 33 states to make gene therapy accessible through Medicaid via outcomes-based payment agreements. Progress — but for now, the cure exists in a place where only a few can reach. That may change.



"When the recording says, 'Your call is important to us,' are you supposed to hear giggling in the background?"

## Why drills, training saves lives

It is easy to roll your eyes at another fire drill. The alarm goes off, you file outside, you stand around, you go back in. What is the point?

Ask the 2,700 employees of Morgan Stanley who walked out of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

Rick Rescorla, the company's security director, had studied the building's vulnerabilities after the 1993 bombing and concluded that another attack was likely. Starting in 1997, he ran mandatory evacuation drills every quarter. Employees practiced descending the stairwells two by two, leaving room for first responders, and gathering at designated meeting points. Some grumbled. Rescorla did not care.

On the morning of September 11, when the second plane hit the South Tower, Morgan Stanley's employees already knew exactly what to do. Nearly all 2,700 made it out alive. Only 13 did not — most of them people who stayed behind to help others, including Rescorla himself.

That is the purpose of every drill you have ever done. Emergency situations create confusion, noise, and panic. Training replaces panic with procedure. Research confirms this: the National Fire Protection Association reports that building occupants who have practiced evacuations move significantly faster and make fewer critical errors than those who have not.

The five minutes you spend on a drill could be the five minutes that save your life. Take them seriously.



## If you see something, say something

Here is a number worth remembering: for every serious workplace injury, there are roughly 300 near-misses that came before it. That is the finding behind what safety researchers call the Safety Triangle, first described by H.W. Heinrich and later expanded by Frank Bird. The pattern is consistent across industries — small hazards that go unaddressed eventually become big ones.

The catch is that most of those 300 near-misses never get reported. A 2025 National Safety Council survey found that 78 percent of serious incidents were preceded by warning signs that nobody flagged. That is not because workers do not notice problems. It is because they wonder whether reporting is worth the trouble, or worry about how it will be received.

Here is what the law says: under Section 11(c) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, every worker has the right to report unsafe conditions without fear of retaliation. You do not have to prove that a hazard will definitely cause harm. You just have to report it in good faith.

And it works. The aviation industry's confidential near-miss reporting system has helped reduce fatal commercial accidents by 65 percent since 1976. When people speak up early, problems get fixed before anyone gets hurt.

If a railing is loose, a chemical label is missing, or a walkway is blocked — say something. You are not being difficult. You are doing exactly what a strong safety culture depends on catching the small problems before they become the big ones.



## Treating cataracts: The good news keeps getting better

June is Cataract Awareness Month, which makes it a good time to know where things stand — and the news is largely encouraging.

Cataracts, the clouding of the eye's natural lens, affect more than 20 million Americans over the age of 40, and that number is expected to surpass 30 million by 2028. Most people develop them gradually, with symptoms becoming significant after age 60. The most common signs are blurry or foggy vision, difficulty driving at night, and colors that seem faded or yellowed.

The treatment — cataract surgery — has become one of the safest and most effective procedures in medicine. Success rates consistently exceed 97 percent, most patients notice improved vision within 24 to 48 hours, and severe complications occur in fewer than one percent of cases. Newer lens options, including light-adjustable lenses that can be fine-tuned after surgery and extended depth-of-focus lenses that reduce the need for reading glasses, are giving patients great outcomes. What does not yet exist, despite some promising headlines, is an eye drop that dissolves cataracts. Research on compounds like lanosterol has shown results in animal models but has not translated to humans. Surgery remains the only proven treatment.

Prevention still matters. UV-blocking sunglasses, a diet rich in vitamins C and E and leafy greens, not smoking, and limiting alcohol all reduce cataract risk. Regular eye exams — every two to four years after 40, every one to two years after 65 — catch them early, when treatment is most straightforward.

## Progress on organ transplant offers hope

More than 100,000 Americans are currently waiting for an organ transplant. Thirteen of them will die today. The math has never worked: there are simply not enough donors to meet the need, and that gap has persisted for decades.

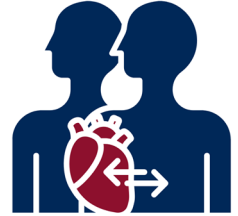
Two different technologies are now attacking the problem from different directions.

The first is xenotransplantation — transplanting organs from animals, specifically pigs, whose organs have been genetically modified to be more compatible with the human body.

In November 2024, Towana Looney became one of the first patients to receive a gene-edited pig kidney in a formal clinical trial at NYU Langone Health. She lived with the organ for 130 days — longer than any pig kidney transplant recipient in history — before an infection forced her to reduce her anti-rejection medication, triggering rejection. The kidney was surgically removed and she returned to dialysis, but she recovered quickly and went home to Alabama. It was a setback, but also proof that a pig kidney can function inside a human being for months. Trials are continuing at multiple hospitals.

The second approach is growing organs in the laboratory entirely from human cells. In June 2025, Stanford researchers achieved a breakthrough in growing heart and liver organoids — miniature organ structures with functional blood vessels — overcoming a key barrier that had limited earlier attempts. A fully transplantable lab-grown organ is likely still a decade away. The pig kidney is not.

Neither technology is ready to solve the transplant crisis today. Both are closer than they have ever been.



## Humor can be good medicine

I told a joke in a Zoom meeting and nobody laughed.  
I guess I'm not REMOTELY funny.

What's the difference between a kleptomaniac and a literalist?

The literalist takes things literally.  
;The kleptomaniac takes things, literally.

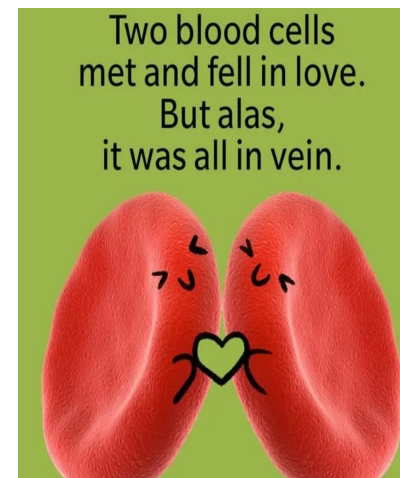
I almost had a psychic girlfriend, ... but she left me before we met.

If Barbie is so popular, why do you have to buy her friends?

My mechanic told me, "I couldn't repair your brakes, so I made your horn louder."

The hardness of the butter is proportional to the softness of the bread.

The colder the x-ray table, the more of your body is required to be on it.



# June 2026

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9 Heart Failure Support Group 5PM ET	10	11  Atlanta Chapter Meeting	12	13
14	15	16 Empower Transplant Meeting 4PM ET	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				



The Mended Hearts, Inc.

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Leesburg, GA 31763  
Phone: 1-888-HEART99 Email: info@mendedhearts.org

MEMBERSHIP FORM

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NEW MENDED HEARTS®  NEW MENDED *LITTLE* HEARTS®  NEW YOUNG MENDED HEARTS®  RENEWAL

Name (Mr./Mrs./Ms.) \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter/Group \_\_\_\_\_ National Member \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

City / ST / Zip \_\_\_\_\_ I want to be a support volunteer:  Yes  No

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in CHD Parent Matching:  Yes  No

(Please check all that apply) I am a  Heart Patient  Caregiver  CHD Parent  Physician  RN  Healthcare Employee

OPTIONAL INFORMATION: Race: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Levels:** All membership levels are for ONE YEAR, renewed annually, except for Heart of Gold Lifetime Sponsorship. Please choose your membership level and complete any appropriate payment information below.

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**ADDITIONAL CHAPTER/GROUP DONATION:**

Membership Level \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter/Group Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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 Young Mended Hearts

Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL TO NATIONAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL TO CHAPTER \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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