

SLEEP APNEA AND YOU



WHAT IS SLEEP APNEA?

Apnea is a word that means to stop breathing for a short period of time. Sleep apnea means to stop breathing during sleep. Most people have a few apneas during sleep, but still sleep well and feel rested in the morning.

People with true sleep apnea may stop breathing as many as 50 times per hour. They do not sleep well because their body wakes them up to breathe after each pause. They usually feel low on energy or tired most of the time, no matter how much sleep they try to get.

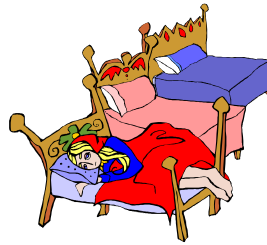
WHAT CAUSES SLEEP APNEA?

Sleep apnea is usually caused by a closed or narrowed air passage. There are no bones in the throat to hold the airway open. When we relax in sleep, our throat muscles relax, too. Normally, this is not a problem, but our air passage narrows as we age and gain weight. Sometimes the throat muscles relax so much that they block the air passage during sleep.

Causes of narrow air passages

- Weight gain
- Large tonsils
- Large tongue
- Long soft palate (roof of the mouth)
- Small jaw
- Blocked nose (allergies or broken nose)
- Tranquilizers, sleeping pills, muscle relaxants or pain medicines
- Alcohol use
- Being sleep deprived

A person with sleep apnea usually snores loudly. The loud snoring stops suddenly as the air passage closes. This quiet time warns others that the person has stopped breathing. The person's chest and stomach muscles work very hard to try to breathe even when the air passage is completely blocked. The apnea is usually followed by a snort or gasp as the person wakes up to take a breath, then the snoring starts again.



HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE SLEEP APNEA?

Many people who have sleep apnea see a doctor after their family complains about their loud snoring. Their snoring can be so loud that it is difficult to sleep with them. People with sleep apnea are usually overweight men over 35 years of age. Women are usually protected by their natural hormones until after menopause.

Many people with sleep apnea report the problems below:

Nighttime problems

Loud snoring
Apneas
Tossing and turning during sleep
Many trips to the bathroom
Choking or smothering feeling
Waking up a lot for no known reason

Daytime problems

Falling asleep reading, watching TV
May fall asleep standing or driving
Feeling tired in the morning
Not interested in sex
Memory problems
Morning headaches
Short-tempered, moody, irritable

As the sleep apnea gets worse, the person has less energy, feels more tired, moves more slowly, and gains more weight. The weight gain makes the air passage smaller and the problem gets worse.



IS SLEEP APNEA DANGEROUS?

Daytime sleepiness can be very dangerous! We are just beginning to realize that many fatal car and truck crashes have been caused by falling asleep at the wheel. You may have heard that a large number of professional drivers have a problem with sleep apnea. The transportation industry is beginning to address this problem.

People with sleep apnea tend to have problems with high blood pressure and congestive heart failure. Because oxygen levels in the blood drop when a person stops breathing, there is strain on the heart and brain which can cause health problems. People with sleep apnea also have a greater risk of heart attacks and stroke.

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY SLEEP APNEA?

There are many ways to prevent sleep apnea or to decrease the symptoms, some of which you can start right now!



Lifestyle Changes

The most important thing you can do to keep the sleep apnea from getting worse is to lose weight. Even losing 15 or 20 lbs can mean a big change for some people. Work with a dietitian to create a balanced diet you can live with. Ask your doctor for an exercise program. Muscles take up less space than fat. It's a lot easier to lose weight if you exercise - you'll feel better and have more energy, too!

After checking with your doctor, here is an easy walking prescription:

	Warm-up (slow walking)	Exercise (brisk walking)	Cool-Down (slow walking)	Total Time
Week 1	5 minutes	5 minutes	5 minutes	15 minutes
Week 2	5 minutes	7 minutes	5 minutes	17 minutes
Week 3-11	<i>Add 2 minutes brisk walking per week</i>			
Week 12	5 minutes	30 minutes	5 minutes	40 minutes

Avoid Drugs that Relax the Airway Muscles



Alcohol and sleeping pills are part of a family of drugs that can increase the risk of airway collapse, especially if they are taken close to bedtime. These drugs can make you so relaxed that your airway narrows even more with sleep. If you use these, you will have more trouble breathing during sleep and feel more tired in the morning.

Drugs that relax the airway:

Alcohol (beer, wine, hard liquor)

Strong antihistamines (Benadryl)

Muscle relaxants and strong pain pills (codeine, morphine, Demerol)

Tranquilizers (Valium)

Street drugs (heroin, “downers”)

Change Your Sleep Position

Some people find that they can breathe more easily if they sleep on their sides instead of their backs. You can give yourself a reminder: tie two tennis balls inside a sock and pin them to your pajama top between your shoulder blades. This will remind you to stay off your back even when you are asleep.

Clear or Open an Obstructed Nose



Sometimes the biggest help for apnea can be to clear or open a narrow nose. Some suggestions are the nasal splints (Breathe-Right or Breathe Easy), and mild antihistamines or decongestants. Your doctor can help you with other medicines if these do not help.

Follow the Rules of Good Sleep Hygiene

These rules are enclosed with this packet. You must allow your body to "prepare" for sleep, such as setting aside a time to calm down and relax, perhaps have a mug of warm milk or decaffeinated tea. Remember - our bodies do not have an "on/off" switch!

WHAT CAN MY DOCTOR DO TO HELP?

There are several ways that sleep apnea can be treated. Not every treatment will work for everyone. Your doctor will suggest the treatment he or she thinks will be best for you.

CPAP, or continuous positive airway pressure, is the most common treatment for sleep apnea. This machine blows a stream of air into your nose to hold your air passages open while you sleep. It involves wearing a mask over your nose. There are many different types and sizes of masks, and you will be fitted with the most comfortable one. Most people have little difficulty getting used to wearing the CPAP at night and most report great improvement in their sleepiness and overall well-being within a few weeks.

For mild to moderate sleep apnea, a jaw advancement dental device may be prescribed. This involves seeing a dentist who specializes in this type of treatment, as these devices should be custom made for the best results. The

dental device is slowly adjusted to move the lower jaw forward, causing the airway to remain open. A home sleep apnea test and/or overnight blood oxygen level test may be necessary to confirm that the device is working. This treatment has not been found to be effective for severe sleep apnea.

Surgery is another option available to treat sleep apnea. Some people can be helped by repairing a physical problem, such as abnormally large tonsils or a broken nose. A procedure to shorten the soft palate and remove excess tissue from the back of the throat can sometimes help. This is usually done in stages to gradually remove the tissue until you are able to breathe normally during sleep. Unfortunately, it is hard to predict which patients will be helped by surgery. Sleep apnea symptoms can return a few months after surgery in about a third of the patients who have surgery.

HOW LONG DOES SLEEP APNEA LAST?

The tendency for sleep apnea lasts a lifetime. It can be controlled and may actually disappear with lifestyle modifications. Weight loss is the single most effective way to control sleep apnea in overweight people. Working closely with your health care team to lose weight, treat allergies, etc, can help you be successful in managing your sleep apnea.

