



Sleep Apnea [Adult]

Sleep apnea (also called “obstructive sleep apnea”) is a condition where there are long pauses between breaths during sleep. This usually occurs when the tissues and muscles in the back of the throat relax too much during sleep. This causes the air passage in your throat to narrow or block off completely. Breathing slows down or stops completely and you then wake up, take a few good breaths and fall back to sleep again. There may be 10 to 60 such awakenings during a night. This prevents you from getting to the deeper stages of sleep that are needed for the body to rest and recover its strength.

During sleep, loud snoring, noisy breathing or gasping sounds are common. The sleep disturbance causes daytime symptoms such as difficulty getting up in the morning, need for daytime naps, irritability as well as poor concentration and attention.

Causes of Sleep Apnea

- ▶ The main risk factor for this kind of sleep apnea is excessive weight gain. Fatty tissue gathers along the sides of the throat causing the air passage to be more narrow than normal.
- ▶ Increasing age is another factor that causes softening of the air passage.
- ▶ Certain neck and jaw shapes are prone to a narrow air passage (such as a receding chin).
- ▶ Enlarged tonsils and adenoids may block the air passage when lying down.
- ▶ Severe nasal congestion.
- ▶ Use of alcohol or sedatives relaxes the muscles in the throat.
- ▶ Smoking can cause inflammation and swelling in the upper air passages and make this problem worse.

Home Care

- ▶ Sleep with your head and neck in a straight or neutral position. If the neck falls back or forward too far, this can block breathing.
- ▶ Limit the use of alcohol and sedatives in the evening.
- ▶ Follow up with your doctor as advised. If you are overweight, talk to your doctor about a weight loss program. If you smoke, talk to your doctor about ways to help you stop.
- ▶ Get prompt medical attention if any of the following occur:
 - Longer pauses than usual
 - Unable to awaken
 - Seizure

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Snoring and Sleep Apnea: Notes for a Partner

Snoring and sleep apnea affect your life, as well as your partner's. You can help in the treatment of the problem. Be supportive. Encourage your partner to get treatment and to make the adjustments needed to follow through.

Adjusting to Changes

Your partner's treatment may involve making changes to certain life habits. You can help your partner make and stick with these changes. For example:

- ▶ Support, and even join, your partner's exercise program.
- ▶ Be supportive if your partner gets CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure). He or she may feel self-conscious at first. Remind your partner to expect adjustments to CPAP before it feels just right.
- ▶ Consider joining a snoring and sleep apnea support group.

Go Along to See the Doctor

You can give the doctor the best account of your partner's nighttime breathing and snoring patterns. Try to go along to doctor's appointments. If you can't go, write notes for your partner to give to the doctor. Describe your partner's snoring and sleep breathing patterns in detail.

Tips for Sleeping with a Snorer

Until treatment takes care of your partner's snoring:

- ▶ Try to go to bed first. It may help if you're already asleep when your partner starts to snore.
- ▶ Wear earplugs to bed. A fan or other source of background noise may also help drown out snoring.