

Snoring & Sleep Apnea

Snoring is any sound that is made while you sleep. It is usually caused by air passing through a narrowed nasal airway or from vibration of the tissues in the back of your throat. It is generally an annoyance to your sleep pattern or to the sleep of those around you. However, snoring may be indicative of a more serious health problem: **obstructive sleep apnea**. Sleep apnea occurs when the throat becomes blocked during sleep, and you may actually stop breathing for short periods of time. This causes brief periods of waking in order for you to start breathing again. The cycle repeats many times throughout the night, leading to poor sleep.

What are some other signs of sleep apnea?

Other than snoring, other signs of sleep apnea include:

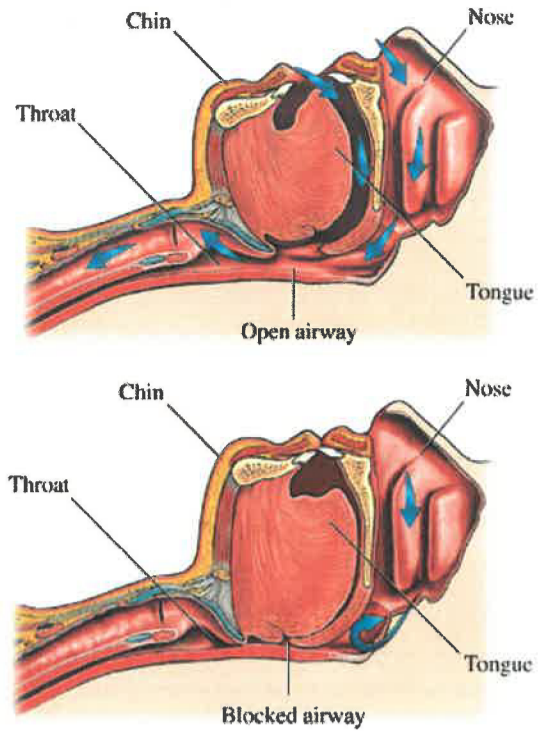
- ◆ Gaspings in your sleep
- ◆ Waking up tired or with a headache
- ◆ Excessive daytime sleepiness
- ◆ Problems with memory or concentration
- ◆ Irritability

If left untreated, sleep apnea can increase your risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke.

How do I know if I have sleep apnea?

Your doctor will generally ask you about your sleep pattern and habits, and if you are experiencing any of the above

symptoms. If you have a partner that sleeps with or near you, he/she can often provide much information about your sleep pattern. A comprehensive exam is then performed, which usually will include an **endoscopy**, where a thin flexible tube is inserted through your nose to evaluate the tissues in the back of your nose and throat. Your doctor will then usually order a **sleep study**, which will monitor your breathing, heart rate, oxygen levels and other functions while you sleep. This is often done in an overnight sleep lab or can also be done at home. The findings of this study will determine whether you have sleep apnea and its severity, so that your doctor can discuss potential options for treatment.



Treatment options for snoring

If your sleep study shows that you do not have sleep apnea, but you are still having trouble with your snoring, your doctor may suggest:

- ◆ Sleeping on your side
- ◆ Weight loss
- ◆ Avoiding alcohol, sedatives, and antihistamines
- ◆ Using Breathe-rite nasal strips to expand the nose at night time

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If these are still unsuccessful, some other treatment options may be recommended, such as radiofrequency ablation or the Pillar procedure. Both procedures are designed to stiffen the tissues of the soft palate, which is often the cause of the snoring. It is important to know that insurance companies do not provide coverage for treatments for snoring.

Treating sleep apnea.

Non-surgical — If the results of your sleep study confirm that you have sleep apnea, treatment options will depend on the severity:

- ◆ Sleep habit modifications: the same as listed above are generally recommended for both sleep apnea and snoring
- ◆ Oral appliance: This is designed to move the jaw and tongue forward to prevent the tongue from blocking your airway when you sleep. Generally these are

custom made by dental specialists

- ◆ CPAP (Continuous positive airway pressure): This is generally considered the best treatment for sleep apnea, regardless of the severity. A small mask is worn over your nose that gently pushes air into the back of the throat, which then widens the airway, allowing you to breathe better. If your initial sleep study shows that you have sleep apnea, usually a second study with usage of CPAP will then be performed on a second visit to determine the optimal settings and appropriate fitting mask. CPAP does take some getting used to, but machines are designed to be very quiet and portable, and masks have been designed to be more comfortable.

Surgical — Surgical treatments for sleep apnea are generally reserved for those patients who have tried CPAP and have not had success with it, or for cases of mild sleep apnea. Some of these include:

- ◆ Nasal surgery: If you have blockage in your nose due to deformities such as a :

deviated septum or enlarged turbinates, your doctor may address this surgically to expand your nasal airway.

- ◆ Jaw surgery: If your jaw sits too far back, this may also cause the back of the tongue to block the back of your throat. An operation to advance the jaw and tongue forward may help. This is usually done by an oral/maxillofacial surgeon.
- ◆ UPPP (uvulopalatopharyngoplasty): This procedure trims the tissue of the soft palate and uvula to expand the airway in the back of your throat. If you have large tonsils, these are removed at the same time. This procedure can be quite painful, and other risks include bleeding, nasal-sounding speech, liquids going into the nose when swallowing, and feeling like there is something in the throat.

Online Resources

- ◆ American Sleep Apnea Association: www.sleepapnea.org
- ◆ National Sleep Foundation: www.sleepfoundation.org