

WHAT IS OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA?

Quick Facts:

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) affects at least 25 million adults in the U.S. It is caused by the collapse of the airway in the back of the nose, mouth and throat during sleep.

KEY POINTS:

- **Sleep apnea is a chronic disease that can cause poor quality sleep and affect mental, physical and sexual performance.**
- **Severe, untreated sleep apnea increases your risk for health problems such as heart disease and stroke.**
- **Excess body weight, a narrow airway, low muscle tone, and genetic predisposition are all risk factors for sleep apnea.**
- **Common warning signs for sleep apnea include snoring, others noticing that your breathing pauses during sleep, and daytime sleepiness.**
- **Sleep apnea can be treated effectively with CPAP therapy or an alternative treatment.**



How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit www.sleepeducation.org

Am I At Risk:

Excess body weight is the leading risk factor for obstructive sleep apnea, but thin people can have sleep apnea too. The risk also increases if you have a large neck, tongue, tonsils or jaw. Sleep apnea is more common in men than in women, but the risk for women increases during and after menopause. Sleep apnea is common in people who have high blood pressure. It also occurs frequently in people who have heart disease, stroke, a mood disorder or Type 2 diabetes.

GENERAL OVERVIEW:

When your airway collapses during sleep, air cannot get to the lungs. This leads to a brief arousal from sleep that causes sleep fragmentation and poor sleep quality. This cycle can repeat hundreds of times in one night, but typically these events are not remembered in the morning.

Your bed partner may notice that you snore loudly or repeatedly stop breathing. Untreated obstructive sleep apnea can cause daytime sleepiness and can even affect your mood. It also increases the risk of obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, erectile dysfunction and depression.

TREATMENTS:

The most common treatment for obstructive sleep apnea is continuous positive airway pressure therapy (CPAP). CPAP therapy provides airflow through a mask worn at night. This airflow increases the air pressure in your airway to keep it open, and restores normal breathing. Alternative treatments for sleep apnea include:

- **Positional therapy:** A special belt or alerting device helps you sleep on your side instead of on your back.
- **Oral appliance therapy:** A custom-fit mouth guard stabilizes the jaw and moves it slightly forward to open the airway.
- **Oral pressure therapy:** A small mouthpiece connected to a tube creates suction in the mouth, pulling the tongue forward and opening the airway.
- **Nasal valves:** Disposable valves are applied to the nostrils nightly to create higher airway pressure, possibly keeping the airway open.
- **Upper airway stimulation:** An implanted device delivers mild electrical stimulation to key airway muscles to prevent blockage.
- **Surgery:** Targeted surgeries help you lose weight, align your jaw or remove soft tissue from your throat.

TIPS:

These tips can help reduce the severity of obstructive sleep apnea:

- Lose weight and maintain a body mass index (BMI) of less than 25.
- Avoid alcohol and sedative medications before bedtime.
- Sleep on your side instead of on your back.
- Exercise regularly.

Next Steps:

- Ask your bed partner if you snore or stop breathing while asleep.
- Talk to your doctor about any obstructive sleep apnea symptoms.
- Your doctor may schedule you for a sleep study if you have symptoms of a sleep disorder such as sleep apnea.
- Discuss all of your medications and herbal supplements with your doctor. Ask about the sleep-related side effects of your medications. Your doctor may adjust your medication timing and dose to help improve your sleep.
- Your doctor may give you questionnaires or a sleep diary to complete.



Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your doctor.



Sample Questions:

Why do I feel tired all the time?

What is a CPAP machine and how can it help me?

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