

COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT SLEEP APNEA

What is sleep apnea?

Sleep apnea is a common and serious sleep disorder that causes a person to stop breathing while asleep. This causes stress and reduced oxygenation to the heart, brain and vital organs of the body. Sleep apnea often makes a person feel tired and unrefreshed in the morning. Daytime fatigue, brain fog, irritability and unintentionally falling asleep are other symptoms.

What are the symptoms of sleep apnea?

- Loud or frequent snoring
- Silent pauses in breathing
- Choking or gasping sounds
- Daytime sleepiness or fatigue
- Unrefreshing sleep
- Insomnia
- Morning headaches
- Nocturia (waking during the night to go to the bathroom)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Memory loss
- Decreased sexual desire
- Irritability

What are the risk factors for sleep apnea?

The major risk factor for sleep apnea is excess body weight. You are much more likely to have sleep apnea if you are overweight or obese/ However sleep apnea can occur in slim people too. Common risk factors for sleep apnea include:

- **Excess weight.** Your risk for sleep apnea is higher if you are overweight with a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or more or obese with a BMI of 30 or higher.
- **Large neck size.** Your risk for sleep apnea is higher if you have a neck size of 17 inches or more for men, or 16 inches or more for women. A large neck has more soft tissue that can block your airway during sleep.

- **Middle age.** Sleep apnea can occur at any age. However, it is more common as a person gets older.
- **Male gender.** Sleep apnea is more common in men than in women. For women the risk of sleep apnea increases with menopause.
- **Hypertension.** High blood pressure is extremely common in people who have sleep apnea.
- **Family history.** Sleep apnea is a heritable condition. This means that you have a higher risk of sleep apnea if a family member also has it. Inherited traits that increase the risk for sleep apnea include obesity and physical features such as recessed jaw. Other common family factors such as physical activity and eating habits may also play a role.

What are the consequences sleep apnea untreated?

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Pre-diabetes and diabetes
- Depression

Untreated sleep apnea has also been associated dementia and cancer.

What treatment is there for sleep apnea?

- **CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure)**
CPAP is a machine that uses a steady stream of air to gently keep your airway open throughout the night so you are able to breathe. You sleep with a mask with a hose that is attached to a machine kept at the bedside. Masks and machines vary depending on your treatment and comfort needs. CPAP is the first line treatment for obstructive sleep apnea.
- **Oral Appliance Therapy**
An oral appliance is a device that fits in your mouth while you sleep. It may resemble a sports mouth guard or an orthodontic retainer. The device prevents the airway from collapsing by holding the tongue in position or by sliding your jaw forward so that you can breathe while you sleep. A dentist trained in dental sleep medicine can fit you with an oral appliance after you are diagnosed with sleep apnea. Oral appliance therapy is recommended for patients with mild to moderate apnea who cannot tolerate CPAP.

- ***Weight Management***

In some cases weight loss can help improve or eliminate your sleep apnea symptoms if you are overweight or obese. Overweight people often have thick necks with extra tissue in the throat that may block the airway. There is no guarantee that losing weight will eliminate your sleep apnea, though it may help. This approach is less likely to make a difference in patients with narrow nasal passages or airway.

- ***Positional Therapy***

This is a behavioral strategy to treat positional sleep apnea. For some people, sleep apnea occurs primarily when sleeping on their back. Their breathing returns to normal when sleeping on their side. Positional therapy may involve wearing a special device around your waist or back to keep you in the side position while asleep.

- ***Lifestyle Changes***

There are a variety of lifestyle changes that you can make to help you reduce your snoring and improve your sleep apnea symptoms. Quitting smoking and not drinking alcohol may improve sleep apnea symptoms. Treatment of allergy symptom can also improve airflow through your nose. In all cases, please speak to your sleep doctor about how to best treat your sleep apnea.