

Sleep Apnea

What is sleep apnea?

Sleep apnea can be a serious sleep disorder. People who have sleep apnea stop breathing for 10 to 30 seconds at a time while they are sleeping. These short stops in breathing can happen up to 400 times every night. If you have sleep apnea, the periods of not breathing may make you wake up from deep sleep. If you are waking up all night long, you aren't getting enough rest from your sleep.

There are 2 kinds of sleep apnea: obstructive apnea and central apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea is the most common type. Nine out of 10 people with sleep apnea have this type of apnea. If you have obstructive apnea, something is blocking the passage or windpipe (called the trachea) that brings air into your body. When you try to breathe, you can't get enough air because of the blockage. Your windpipe might be blocked by your tongue, tonsils or uvula (the little piece of flesh that hangs down in the back of your throat). It might also be blocked by a large amount of fatty tissue in the throat or even by relaxed throat muscles.

Central sleep apnea is rare. This type of sleep apnea is related to the function of the central nervous system. If you have this type of apnea, the muscles you use to breathe don't get the "go-ahead" signal from your brain. Either the brain doesn't send the signal, or the signal gets interrupted.

Is sleep apnea common?

Doctors estimate that more than 12 million Americans have sleep apnea. Men, people who are overweight, or over 40 years old are more likely to have sleep apnea, but it can affect anyone at any age. If you are interested in meeting other people who have sleep apnea, you can visit the [American Sleep Apnea Association's Web site](#) to find the location of a support group near you.

How do I know if I have sleep apnea?

Because some of the symptoms of sleep apnea occur while you're sleeping, the person you sleep with may notice it first. You, or that person, may notice heavy snoring or long pauses in your breathing during sleep. Even if you don't remember waking up during the night, you may notice daytime sleepiness (such as falling asleep at work, while driving or when talking), irritability or fatigue. You may also experience morning headaches, forgetfulness, mood changes and a decreased interest in sex.

Your doctor can diagnose sleep apnea. He or she may ask you if you feel tired or sleepy during the day. Your doctor may also want to know about your bedtime habits and how well you sleep. Your doctor may ask you to go to a sleep center for a sleep study. Tests done at the sleep center may reveal which kind of sleep apnea you have. You may also need to take some equipment home with you to do a sleep study there.

Is sleep apnea dangerous?

Sleep apnea can cause serious problems if it isn't treated. Your risk of heart disease and stroke is higher if serious sleep apnea goes untreated. You are also more likely to have traffic accidents if you drive while you're sleepy. If you have sleep apnea, it is very important to get treatment.

Is there anything I can do to help my sleep apnea?

Yes. The following steps help many people who have sleep apnea sleep better:

- A. Stop all use of alcohol or sleep medicines. These relax the muscles in the back of your throat, making it harder for you to breathe.
- B. If you smoke, quit smoking.

- C. If you are overweight, lose weight.
- D. Sleep on your side instead of on your back.

How is sleep apnea treated?

Certain dental devices can be used to treat mild cases of obstructive sleep apnea. These devices move your jaw forward to make breathing easier.

A common treatment for sleep apnea is called "continuous positive airway pressure," or CPAP. In this treatment, you wear a special mask over your nose and mouth while you are sleeping. The mask will keep your airway open by adding pressure to the air you breathe. It helps most people who have sleep apnea.

In very few cases, surgery is necessary to remove tonsils or extra tissue from the throat.

Will this problem change my life?

Actually, sleep apnea may already have affected you more than you know. Chances are things will improve for you once the diagnosis is made and you start treatment. Whatever your treatment, remember that you are not alone and help is available.

Other Organizations

- [American Sleep Apnea Association](#)
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[Revolution Health Sleep Community](#)

Source

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Another device that can be quite helpful for only \$29.95 can be found at;
<http://www.puresleep.com/index.htm>
This is a device that holds the lower jaw forward giving a better airway.