

The Columbus Community Health Regional Sleep Disorders Center

1430 South High Street, Columbus OH 43207 - (614) 443-7800

For more information, visit The Sleep Site (www.thesleepsite.com)

INFORMATION ON SLEEP APNEA AND RELATED DISORDERS

What is sleep apnea?

Repeated pauses in breathing (apneas) lasting at least 10 seconds. In severe cases, hundreds of breathing pauses can occur every night. It can result either from collapse of throat (which may cause loud snores or gasps) or from lack of breathing effort.

Is regular snoring without apneas OK?

Not necessarily. Some patients must struggle to get every breath, to the point that the resulting dramatic swings in pressure within their chest can even cause collapse of the left side of the heart! This condition (called Upper Airway Resistance Syndrome) can cause severe sleepiness and high blood pressure, and it may eventually lead to sleep apnea.

What else can go wrong with breathing during sleep?

Some people who are quite overweight, who have lung or heart problems, or who have other medical problems that make them breathe too shallowly have repeated drops in their oxygen levels during sleep. Such can occur without snoring, breathing pauses or any symptoms!

Wouldn't I know it if I stopped breathing in my sleep?

No. Some patients have over one hundred apneas per hour but have no symptoms or any awakenings with distress!

What are some factors that might put me at greater risk of having a breathing problem during sleep?

- Being overweight...but many thin people have severe sleep apnea!
- Nasal congestion or obstruction, “sinus trouble” or allergies.
- Large tonsils and/or adenoids, having a “crowded throat”, large tongue or small jaw.
- Lung disease, atrial fibrillation and heart failure.
- Scoliosis or muscle weakness, sleeping pills, other sedating medicines and alcohol.

Is sleep apnea common?

Extremely common! It occurs in up to 24% of men over age 40, in many women and children and in slender people.

What symptoms and complications can result?

- Snoring, pauses in breathing and gasping are often present--but in some patients, no snoring or pauses are noted!
- Daytime sleepiness, often underestimated or not even recognized by the person with the problem, with a resulting seven to twelve-fold increased risk of serious auto accidents; chronic fatigue symptoms and fibromyalgia.
 - Irritability, depression, mood swings, personality change, ADHD-like symptoms, impotence and memory problems.
 - Restless sleep, night sweats, frequent awakenings to urinate, headaches and dry throat on awakening, and in some but not all people, arousals with choking, chest pain or shortness of breath and violent behaviors in sleep.
 - In severe cases, high blood pressure, heart failure, heart attack, strokes, cardiac arrest, accelerated development of coronary disease, sleep-related convulsions and premature death.

Are these problems serious enough to be considered urgent?

In many cases, yes. Severe sleep apnea can represent an *emergent condition* warranting rapid diagnosis and treatment, given its potentially devastating complications

Can it usually be effectively treated?

Yes! Treatment, which must be tailored to the individual's needs, is highly successful. The leading treatment in adults is nasal CPAP and its variants, which involve use of a small "blower" device that immediately prevents throat collapse. Children with large adenoids and tonsils respond far better than adults to surgeries. Treatment can prevent serious health problems and help ensure that you will have the energy you need to enjoy life to its fullest.

If you may have sleep apnea, what should you do?

Evaluation and treatment without delays are important, since sleep apnea's complications are so serious and because it is so readily treated. You can arrange a prompt assessment by calling (614) 443-7800.

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