

The physiological consequences of sleep apnea can produce physical changes in the brain that have been associated with depression, anxiety, panic disorder, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, and dementia. The relationship between sleep and mood is complex, because disrupted sleep can lead to emotional changes, clinical depression or anxiety as well as other psychiatric conditions. These conditions can also compound or further disrupt sleep. In fact, altered sleep patterns are a hallmark of many mental health issues. Identifying and treating sleep apnea can result in improved mental health.

There are two forms of sleep apnea: obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) and central sleep apnea (CSA). People can have both. OSA is a blockage of your airway that causes airflow to your lungs to stop while you are sleeping. CSA is due to a pause in your breathing from miscommunication between your brain and breathing muscles. These events repeatedly occur during the night and continue night after night, eventually affecting brain activity and neurochemicals that affect mood and thinking.

Treating sleep apnea in patients with mental health conditions can improve the quality of a patient's life.

What should I do about it?

Diagnosis - Sleep apnea is often first suspected by your family. Ask your bed partner if you snore, snort, gasp or struggle to breathe, or have pauses in breathing while you sleep. These are signs you may have sleep apnea. Let your doctor know so that they can determine if you are at risk for sleep apnea. A sleep study is the test used to diagnose sleep apnea and other sleep conditions. These tests measure your heart rate, blood oxygen level, airflow and breathing patterns. If the results are not normal, your doctor will discuss treatment options.

What are the symptoms?

- **Waking up many times each night**
- **Insomnia**
- **Lack of energy**
- **Feeling sleepy or tired all day**

What are the treatment options?

Treatment may include the following:

CPAP or BPAP – While wearing a mask during sleep the CPAP or BPAP machine moves air into the nasal passages at pressures high enough to allow normal breathing.

Weight loss – Weight loss helps to decrease the severity of sleep apnea.

Oxygen – The use of oxygen alone or in addition to PAP therapy can be used to treat some forms of sleep apnea.

Oral device – These devices enlarge the airway by pulling the jaw forward to allow for normal breathing.

Why do I need to be tested and treated?

Several research studies have shown that many patients with mental health conditions experience the following benefits by treating their sleep apnea:

- Improved sleep quality
- Reduced severity of anxiety and depression
- Alleviated anxiety and depression in bed partners
- Deeper and more restorative sleep can improve both physical and mental health

Talk to your physician about your sleep concerns and symptoms.