

What is sleep apnea?

Medical professionals and insurance carriers recognize sleep apnea as a significant, potentially life-threatening condition requiring prompt diagnosis and treatment. Typically, snoring is no more than an inconvenience and is not life-threatening, however, it can be a prime symptom of sleep apnea. For a person with sleep apnea, breathing stops from 10 seconds to more than a minute at a time, and these attacks can occur from five to more than one hundred times an hour during sleep. As a result, oxygen levels in the bloodstream fall, which may lead to high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack and/or abnormal heart rhythms. This may also impact your memory. Although it is most common in overweight men, both adults and children of either gender can be affected.

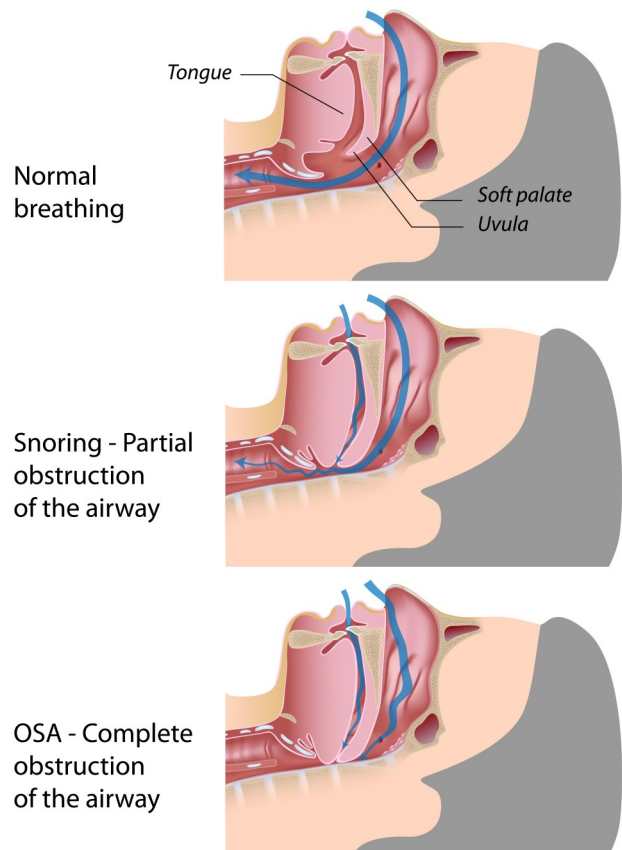
There are two types of sleep apnea, Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) and Central Sleep Apnea (CSA)

Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Obstructive Sleep Apnea occurs when muscles of the soft palate and throat relax during sleep, obstructing the airway and making breathing difficult and noisy (snoring). Eventually, the airway walls collapse blocking airflow entirely, which results in a breathing pause or apnea. Paused breathing can result in a drop of blood oxygen levels. Since oxygen is the fuel for the cardiovascular system, this stresses the heart and puts the sleeper at a greater risk for heart attack or stroke.

Central Sleep Apnea

Central Sleep Apnea occurs when the brain fails to tell the lungs to breathe during sleep. As this signal is lost, the lungs do not take in the oxygen that your body needs. This condition is less common than OSA. This is associated with heart failure, certain medications, or central nervous system diseases such as stroke.



What are the symptoms of sleep apnea?

- Loud, irregular snoring
- Daytime sleepiness
- Morning headaches
- Weight gain
- Frequent nocturnal urination
- Obesity
- High blood pressure on multiple medications
- Falling asleep while driving
- Loss of energy
- Anxiety or depression

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Sleep Apnea Testing and Treatment

What are the consequences of sleep apnea?

Untreated sleep apnea may cause high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack and abnormal heart rhythms. The National Commission on Sleep Disorders estimates that 38,000 people die each year because of the untreated cardiovascular complications of sleep apnea.

What are the next steps?

- You will have a sleep clinic visit appointment.
OR
- A physician will order an overnight sleep study at a sleep center or possibly a Home Sleep Apnea Test.

What is a sleep study?

A sleep study is similar to an EEG study. Many signals are recorded throughout the night including brain waves, respiration, oxygen levels, and limb movements. The electrodes are resting on the skin attached by a medical adhesive and tape.

These tests begin at night and last through the morning, as would a normal night of sleep.

Home sleep apnea testing may be ordered to look for obstructive sleep apnea. This is a simplified version of an in lab sleep study. Respiratory patterns, oxygen levels, and airflow are recorded. If OSA is found, treatment can begin. If the testing does not show OSA but your physician feels strongly that you have OSA, a more detailed test is performed in the sleep lab.

What are the treatment options?

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP)

- Most common treatment option
- Pressurized air goes through the nose to keep the airway open
- Oxygen and carbon dioxide levels return to normal
- Sleep is deeper and more restorative
- Many mask options are available

Bi-level Therapy (BPAP)

- Similar to CPAP except two pressures are set – one for inspiration (inhaling), one for expiration (exhaling)
- Some patients with lung disease do better with this device than CPAP
- Masks are identical to CPAP masks

Weight Loss

- Weight loss helps decrease the severity of sleep apnea. Even losing a little weight makes a big difference.

Oral Appliances

- These devices enlarge the airway by pulling the jaw forward. They are effective for mild-to-moderate OSA and generally well-tolerated.

Surgery

- Is the most effective treatment for snoring, but is not as effective in treatment for sleep apnea in adults. There are many types of surgery available.