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Sleep Apnea Affects More Than Your Sleep

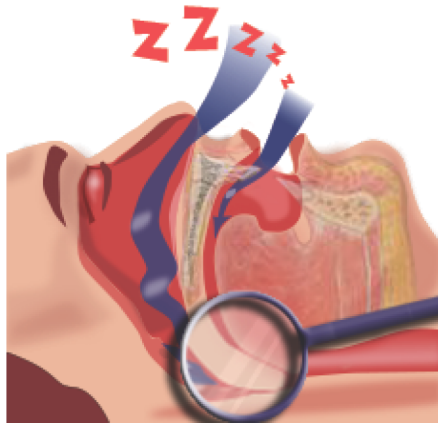
Presented by: Dr. Sherry McAllister

As the obesity epidemic rises around the world, we see how this problem multiplies several serious health conditions. One of these conditions will literally keep you awake at night: sleep apnea. Obese people are at greater risk to develop this condition. It affects about 18 million people in North America and that number is expected to steadily increase.

There are two types. *Obstructive* sleep apnea is the most common, and it occurs when your airway is blocked because soft tissue at the back of the throat collapses during sleep. When this happens, the brain alerts you by waking you. Depending on the severity of the condition, you may wake several hundred times throughout your sleep cycle - even though you may not remember all waking periods.

The less common *central* sleep apnea happens when the brain does not send signals to the muscles to breathe but the airway is not actually blocked. This condition indicates a problem in the respiratory system.

Without restful sleep, you greatly increase the risk of heart attacks, strokes, diabetes and hypertension.



Sleep apnea can occur in men, women and children. However, several risk factors can boost your chances of developing this problem. These include obesity, over 40 years of age, a large neck size (16" inches plus), nasal obstructions, gastrointestinal reflux, or a family history of sleep apnea. Men are also more likely to develop this condition than women.

When you have sleep apnea, you often...

- Snore loudly
- Gasp for breath while sleeping
- Awake frequently
- Suffer morning headaches
- Experience daytime sleepiness
- Have concentration and memory problems
- Feel depressed

Exercise of the Week

Lumbar stabilization (stage 2)

Difficulty: Easy to moderate

(Consult your chiropractor before starting this or any other exercise.)

Start: On hands and knees. Be aware of position of spine – start with a neutral spine or a flat back. Engage inner abdominal muscles by bringing belly button inward.

Exercise: Keeping spine steady, bring one elbow out to side, arm bent to 90 degrees with hand at same level as elbow. Then, bring opposite knee out to side, leg bent to 90 degrees with foot at same level as knee. Balance and hold for 10-15 seconds. Switch arm/leg, balance and hold for 10-15 seconds. Perform 3-5 sets of this exercise per side.



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Poor Sleep Equals Poor Health

Many people underestimate how insufficient sleep can harm their health. A study from Sweden found stroke victims with obstructive sleep apnea were more likely to die than those with no history of this sleep disorder.¹

Yale University published research that revealed patients with obstructive sleep apnea had a 30% higher risk of having a heart attack or dying over a four to five year period. Those patients who were diagnosed with severe sleep apnea had the greatest chance of heart attack or death. This is probably due to decreased oxygen intake caused by the breathing stoppages that occur in sleep apnea sufferers.²

Another startling risk is motor vehicle injuries. In research presented at an annual conference of the American Thoracic Society, scientists showed drivers with a history of sleep apnea were twice as likely to have a motor vehicle accident – 250 total car accidents for the sleep apnea group over three years, but only 125 accidents for non-sleep apnea group over the same time.³

Diagnosis and Treatment

If you need to be tested for sleep apnea, your physician may refer you to a sleep clinic. There, you will undergo a polysomnogram in which a technician attaches electrodes to your head and body. The electrodes transmit information to a machine that records your electrical signals, muscle activity and oxygen levels. A sleep specialist analyzes the results from the test to determine if you have sleep apnea.

You may be able to treat mild sleep apnea with lifestyle changes. Experts recommend you avoid consuming alcohol, smoking, using sleep pills and sleeping on your back.

Losing weight may also help diminish sleep apnea. Sweden's Karolinska Institute enlisted 60 overweight and obese men with moderate or severe sleep apnea. The men were placed on a calorie restricted diet for nine weeks. At the end of the study, the men lost an average of 40 pounds and saw significant relief from sleep apnea symptoms.⁴

Dental appliances designed specifically for sleep apnea may be beneficial for some patients.

If your sleep apnea cannot be controlled through lifestyle changes or dental devices, it may be necessary for you to use a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine. This machine pumps continuous air through a hose and into your nose. The resulting air pressure keeps your airway clear and prevents sleep disruption.

Nasal and soft tissue surgery can be performed to alleviate sleep apnea. However, surgery does not guarantee a cure. Most physicians recommend less invasive techniques like lifestyle changes and CPAP machines.

If you frequently awake during sleep, you should discuss it with your primary healthcare specialist. Even if you are not diagnosed with sleep apnea, you want to address your insomnia as it can have a profound impact on your current and future health.

Quote to Inspire

"A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book."

Irish Proverb

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4. Effect of a very low energy diet on moderate and severe obstructive sleep apnea in obese men: a randomised controlled trial - *BMJ. 2009; 339: b4609. Published online 2009 December 3. doi: 10.1136/bmj.b4609*



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