

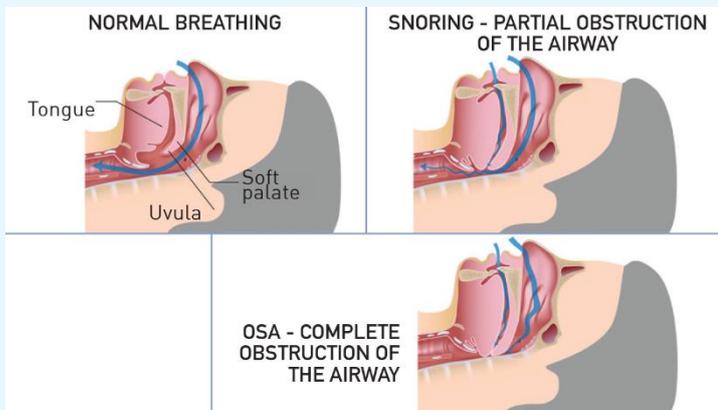
SLEEP APNEA

WHAT IS SLEEP APNEA?

Sleep apnea occurs when the airway in your throat collapses during sleep, reducing airflow or completely blocking the airway. This disrupts sleep and reduces oxygen supply to vital organs. Severe sleep apnea affects approximately 5% of adults. Mild to moderate sleep apnea occurs in 20% of adults. Fortunately, effective treatments are available to help those with sleep apnea lead a healthy life.

WHAT CAUSES SLEEP APNEA?

There are two types of apnea: obstructive apnea and central apnea. **Obstructive apnea** is much more common. It occurs when the muscles around your airway relax during sleep and partially or fully block the air passage between your nose or mouth and your lungs. **Central apnea** is rarer and occurs when the brain signals regulating your breathing are disrupted.



THE SYMPTOMS OF SLEEP APNEAS

People with sleep apnea usually snore loudly and experience restless sleep. These symptoms are often observed by his or her partner. The partner may also notice pauses in breathing. Each pause typically ends with a very deep gasp or snort as the person struggles to breathe. The person with sleep apnea may wake up feeling unrefreshed and very sleepy throughout the day. It can affect his or her ability to concentrate and function at work. Other



symptoms may include sore throats, chronic cough, depression, apathy, irritability, reduced libido, loss of memory and concentration, and increased frequency of urination at night.

HOW IS SLEEP APNEA DIAGNOSED?

The only way to diagnose sleep apnea is with an overnight sleep study. This can be done in the privacy of your own home or in a hospital where your sleep behaviour will be monitored. You will need a referral from your GP or sleep physician.

SLEEP APNEA TREATMENT

1. The treatment of choice for severe sleep apnea is nasal continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). This consists of a pump that blows air through a mask worn over the nose. CPAP only needs to be used when you sleep. When used, it alleviates sleepiness and improves symptoms. The noise from the machine is usually quieter than any snoring from untreated sleep apnea.
2. Oral appliances that fit completely in the mouth and hold the bottom jaw forward will reduce the severity of sleep apnea. They are very effective and are generally the first choice for patients with mild-moderate sleep apnea. They require an experienced dentist to custom make and fit them and monitor the results.
3. Surgical treatments are sometimes recommended.
4. Other treatments may help, including nasal valves and

devices to prevent you from sleeping on your back. However, it is very important any treatment you undertake is supervised by a sleep physician and if necessary, a repeat sleep study conducted to monitor the effectiveness of your treatment.

5. Weight loss may help or even cure the apnea. It may be the most important step you can take to reduce your risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease (such as high blood pressure).
6. Avoid alcohol or sleeping tablets. These cause your muscles to relax and depress the drive to breathe. This may exacerbate your apnea. Try maintaining a regular sleeping pattern and avoid caffeine or eating late at night.

SLEEP APNEA AFFECTS FAMILIES

Snoring and apnea can be extremely irritating and disrupt the sleep of a partner. These issues can aggravate or strain marriages and family relationships. This may be compounded by the unexplained sleepiness or seeming lack of interest in family life by the person affected with sleep apnea.

SLEEP APNEA IS ASSOCIATED WITH HEART ATTACKS AND STROKE

There is strong evidence that people with moderate to severe sleep apnea die prematurely. You are also more likely to have cardiovascular disease if you have sleep apnea than someone without sleep apnea. Towards the end of each apnea cycle, blood pressure may rise substantially whilst your heartbeat becomes irregular. This may lead to high blood pressure (hypertension) during the day. If you are overweight, you may also be at risk of having diabetes and high cholesterol. Together, these risk factors increase your chances of having a heart attack or stroke.

SLEEP APNEA CAUSES MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS

Research has shown that people with sleep apnea are at least four times more likely to have a car accident. Their performance on driving simulators is noticeably worse, as disrupted nighttime sleep impairs their ability to concentrate and increases the chances of falling asleep at the wheel. This can be a lethal combination when sleep apnea occurs in people who have occupations involving operating machinery or transport.

ABOUT US

Sleep Disorders Australia (SDA) is a voluntary not-for-profit organisation that provides information and support to people affected by sleep disorders throughout Australia. SDA advocates the needs of people with sleep disorders by raising awareness of sleep disorders and their impact on our lives. We also offer support and education with regards to preventing and treating sleep disorders.

We would be delighted if you joined us. Membership is open to sufferers, family members, medical professionals, and the general public. You can join via our website or email our membership officer for more information.

If you would like to support us financially, you can donate via our website or send a cheque to our address.

CONTACT INFO

 www.sleepoz.org.au

 admin@sleepoz.org.au

 Sleep Disorders Australia
PO Box 5278 Algester Qld 4115

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DISCLAIMER: Information in this fact sheet is general in nature. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Discuss with your doctor if you are concerned about your sleep or other medical conditions.

