



Sleep Apnea - Overview & Facts

Obstructive sleep apnea is a common and serious sleep disorder that causes you to stop breathing during sleep. The airway repeatedly becomes blocked, limiting the amount of air that reaches your lungs. When this happens, you may snore loudly or making choking noises as you try to breathe. Your brain and body becomes oxygen deprived and you may wake up. This may happen a few times a night, or in more severe cases, several hundred times a night.

In many cases, an apnea, or temporary pause in breathing, is caused by the tissue in the back of the throat collapsing. The muscles of the upper airway relax when you fall asleep. If you sleep on your back, gravity can cause the tongue to fall back. This narrows the airway, which reduces the amount of air that can reach your lungs. The narrowed airway causes snoring by making the tissue in back of the throat vibrate as you breathe.

Sleep apnea can make you wake up in the morning feeling tired or unrefreshed even though you have had a full night of sleep. During the day, you may feel fatigued, have difficulty concentrating or you may even unintentionally fall asleep. This is because your body is waking up numerous times throughout the night, even though you might not be conscious of each awakening.

The lack of oxygen your body receives can have negative long-term consequences for your health. This includes:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Pre-diabetes and diabetes
- Depression

There are many people with sleep apnea who have not been diagnosed or received treatment. A sleep medicine physician can diagnose obstructive sleep apnea using an in-lab sleep study or a home sleep apnea test. Sleep apnea is manageable using [continuous positive airway pressure \(CPAP\) therapy](#), the front-line treatment for sleep apnea, [oral appliance therapy](#) or [surgery](#).

Obstructive sleep apnea in adults is considered a sleep-related breathing disorder. Causes and symptoms differ for obstructive sleep apnea in children and central sleep apnea.

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