

Use a humidifier

Humidifiers are devices that add moisture to the air. Dry air can irritate the body and the respiratory system. Using a humidifier can open your airways, decrease congestion, and encourage clearer breathing. For added benefits, consider adding lavender, peppermint, or eucalyptus oil to a humidifier. These three essential oils have known anti-inflammatory and soothing benefits. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on cleaning your humidifier. They can harbour moulds and bacteria.

Avoid alcohol and smoking

Lifestyle changes can improve your health and encourage better sleeping habits. Consider quitting smoking and limiting your alcohol intake to reduce sleep apnea complications. Alcohol relaxes the throat muscles that control your breathing. This can lead to snoring and an interrupted sleep cycle. It can also lead to inflammation in your airways, blocking your airflow. Similar to alcohol, tobacco use can also contribute to inflammation and swelling in your airways. This can worsen your snoring and your sleep apnea. A recent study identified smoking as a risk factor for developing sleep apnea. The study noted that people with sleep apnea may have a predisposition to smoking as well, so treating sleep apnea may help in quitting smoking.

Use oral appliances

Oral appliances can help with sleep apnea by repositioning your jaw or tongue to keep your airway open while you sleep. The two major categories are mandibular advancement devices and tongue stabilising devices. These work by moving your lower jaw or tongue forward to decrease the obstruction in the back of your throat. These appliances range from low-cost, over-the-counter (OTC) options to devices that are custom-fit by a dentist. Dental Sleep Medicine supports oral appliances as an effective therapy for sleep apnea.

WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

Make an appointment with your doctor if you're exhibiting any of the symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea, especially:

- Loud, disruptive snoring
- Episodes of stopped breathing while sleeping
- Abrupt awakenings from sleep that are frequently accompanied by gasping or choking

Your doctor may refer you to a sleep specialist, a medical doctor with additional training and education in sleep medicine.

SUMMARY

Severe obstructive sleep apnea is a serious sleep disorder that involves breathing that repeatedly stops and starts while you sleep. Obstructive sleep apnea left untreated or undiagnosed can have serious and life-threatening consequences. If you're experiencing any symptoms, make an appointment to see your doctor for a diagnosis and treatment options.



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PREHABILITATION HEALTH CONDITIONS SLEEPING DIFFICULTIES SEVERE SLEEP APNEA

Obstructive sleep apnea is a severe sleep disorder. It causes breathing to stop and start repeatedly while you sleep. With sleep apnea, the muscles in your upper airway relax while you're sleeping. This causes your airways to become blocked off, keeping you from getting enough air. This may cause your breathing to pause for 10 seconds or longer until your reflexes initiate breathing to restart. You're considered to have severe sleep apnea if your breathing stops and restarts more than 30 times an hour. The apnea-hypopnea index (AHI) measures obstructive sleep apnea to determine a range from mild to severe, based on the number of breathing pauses per hour you have while sleeping.

SYMPTOMS OF SEVERE SLEEP APNEA

Your bed partner may notice some symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea before you're aware of them, including:

- Loud snoring
- Episodes of stopped breathing during sleep

Symptoms you both may observe:

- Abrupt awakenings from sleep, often accompanied by choking or gasping
- Decreased libido
- Mood changes or irritability
- Night-time sweating

Symptoms that you might notice:

- Daytime sleepiness
- Difficulty with concentration and memory
- Dry mouth or sore throat
- Morning headaches

HOW SERIOUS IS SLEEP APNEA?

According to research, sleep apnea can have long-term effects on your health. Sleep apnea left untreated or undiagnosed can have serious consequences, such as:

- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Depression
- Diabetes

There are secondary effects as well, such as automobile accidents caused by falling asleep at the wheel.



RISK FACTORS FOR SLEEP APNEA

You are at a higher risk for obstructive sleep apnea if:

- **You are overweight or obese.** Although anyone can have sleep apnea, obesity is considered by research to be the most important risk factor. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, sleep apnea affects over 20 percent of people with obesity compared to about 3 percent of people of moderate weight. Obstructive sleep apnea can also be caused by conditions associated with obesity, such as polycystic ovary syndrome and hypothyroidism.
- **You're male.** Men are 2 to 3 times more likely to have obstructive sleep apnea than premenopausal women. The risk is about the same for men and postmenopausal women.
- **You have a family history.** If obstructive sleep apnea has been diagnosed in other family members, you may be at higher risk.
- **You're older.** Obstructive sleep apnea becomes increasingly frequent as you age, levelling off once you reach your 60s and 70s.
- **You smoke.** Obstructive sleep apnea is more common in people who smoke.
- **You have certain medical conditions.** Your risk of developing obstructive sleep apnea may increase if you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or asthma.
- **You have chronic nasal congestion.** Obstructive sleep apnea occurs twice as often in people with chronic nasal congestion at night.
- **You have a crowded pharynx.** Anything that makes the pharynx, or upper airway smaller – such as large tonsils or glands – can result in a greater chance for obstructive sleep apnea.

WHAT CAN BE DONE FOR SEVERE SLEEP APNEA?

Treatment for severe obstructive sleep apnea includes lifestyle changes, therapies and surgeries, if needed.

Lifestyle changes

Those with an obstructive sleep apnea diagnosis will be encouraged to, if necessary:

- Maintain a moderate weight
- Quit smoking
- Participate in regular exercise
- Reduce alcohol consumption

Therapy

Therapies to address sleep apnea include:

- Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) that uses air pressure to keep your airways open during sleep
- Oral device or mouthpiece designed to keep your throat open while sleeping

Surgery

Your doctor may recommend surgery, such as:

- Uvulopalatopharyngoplasty (UPPP) to remove tissue to create space
- Upper airway stimulation
- Jaw surgery to create space
- Tracheostomy to open the neck, usually only in the case of life-threatening obstructive sleep apnea
- Implants to reduce upper airway collapse

SLEEP APNEA LIFESTYLE REMEDIES

Some home remedies may offer the same benefits. Here are six alternative treatments to reduce sleep apnea symptoms.

Maintain a healthy weight

Doctors commonly recommend people with sleep apnea to lose weight. Obesity, specifically in the upper body, can increase the risk of airway obstruction and narrow nasal passages. These obstructions can cause you to stop breathing suddenly or for lengths of time while sleeping. Maintaining a healthy weight can keep your airways clear and reduce sleep apnea symptoms. Research shows that modest weight reduction in people with obesity can eliminate the need for upper airway surgery or long-term CPAP therapy. In some cases, weight loss can eliminate sleep apnea. However, if you regain the weight, it's possible for the condition to return.

Try yoga

Regular exercise can increase your energy level, strengthen your heart, and improve sleep apnea. Yoga can specifically improve your respiratory strength and encourage oxygen flow. Sleep apnea is associated with decreased oxygen saturation in your blood. Yoga can improve your oxygen levels through its various breathing exercises. As a result, yoga reduces the amount of sleep interruptions you may experience.

Alter your sleep position

Though a small change, altering your sleep position can reduce sleep apnea symptoms and improve your night's rest. A recent study found that more than half of obstructive sleep apnea cases are dependent on position. Studies have shown sleeping on your back – called the supine position – can worsen symptoms. For some adults, sleeping on the side can help breathing return to normal. However, a older study found that children with sleep apnea sleep better on their backs. Discuss body positioning and your sleep apnea symptoms with your doctor to evaluate your options for treatment.