Get the Facts on Snoring and Sleep Apnea

**Snoring**

Snoring is actually very common. Forty-five percent of adults snore occasionally, and 25 percent snore every night. So, is snoring a problem? Statistics say yes. Snoring is not just a nuisance. It indicates there is some resistance in the normal path of air to the lungs and may be a symptom of a more serious medical condition, Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA). In addition, snoring can cause stress on relationships as the sleep of the bed partner is also disrupted, leading up to 80 percent of these couples sleeping in different rooms.

**Sleep Apnea**

Sleep apnea is a disorder in which a person stops breathing during the night, perhaps hundreds of times, usually for periods of 10 seconds or longer. In most cases the person is unaware of it, although sometimes he or she may awaken and gasp on occasion.

**Obstructive Sleep Apnea**

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), the most common form of apnea, occurs when tissues in the upper throat (or airway) collapse at intervals during sleep, thereby blocking the passage of air. In general, OSA occurs as follows:

- On its way to the lungs, air passes through the nose, mouth, and throat (known as the upper airway).
- Under normal conditions, the back of the throat is soft and pliant and tends to collapse inward as a person breathes.
- Certain muscles, called dilator muscles, work against this to keep the airway open. Interference or an abnormality in this process causes air turbulence.
- In some cases, the interference is incomplete (called obstructive hypopnea) and causes continuous but slow and shallow breathing. In response the throat vibrates and makes the sound of snoring. Snoring can occur whether a person breathes through the mouth or the nose, and it should be noted snoring could occur without sleep apnea.
- If the tissues at the back of the throat collapse and become momentarily blocked, apnea occurs. Apnea literally means absence of breath.
- Apnea decreases the amount of oxygen in the blood, and eventually this lack of oxygen triggers the lungs to suck in air.
- At this point, the patient may make a gasping or snorting sound but does not usually fully wake up.
- Patients with OSA may experience 30 to 500 such events per night, many lasting 30 seconds or more. Over time, these repeated arousals and obstructive events fragment and interrupt the sleep cycle, robbing patients of restful sleep.
Signs and Symptoms of Sleep Apnea

- Loud snoring
- Witnessed pauses in breathing
- Gasping or choking during sleep
- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Lack of energy/fatigue
- Morning headaches
- Dry mouth or sore throat in the morning
- Restless sleep
- Poor concentration
- Loss of memory
- Depression
- Anxiety/Irritability
- Sexual dysfunction
- Gastroesophageal reflux

Risk Factors for Sleep Apnea

- Male gender – Men have twice the risk of having sleep apnea compared to women.
- Excess weight – An adult with a BMI of 25 is considered to be overweight and a BMI over 30 is considered obese. The risk of sleep apnea increases with the amount of excess body weight.
- Large neck circumference – A large neck (circumference greater than 17” for men and 16” for women) will have more fatty tissue that can narrow the airway.
- Physical characteristics – There are specific physical characteristics that increase one’s risk for sleep apnea: Narrow upper jaw, large tongue, receding chin, enlarged tonsils, longer and stiffer soft palate, or a soft palate that collapses easily.
- Smoking – Smokers are at higher risk for apnea, with heavy smokers (more than 2 packs a day) having a risk 40 times greater than nonsmokers.
- Alcohol and sedatives – Alcohol and sedatives may relax the upper airway muscles allowing the tissues at the back of the throat to collapse and cause symptoms of sleep apnea.
- Age – While children and adults can have sleep apnea, the risk of sleep apnea increases with age.
- Family history – Having family members with sleep apnea may increase one’s risk due either to inherited physical traits or common lifestyles.
- Other medical conditions – High blood pressure (hypertension) is very common in people with sleep apnea and 48% of patients with Type 2 diabetes have sleep apnea.

Serious Health Effects of Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea has been linked to the following serious health conditions:

- High blood pressure
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Pulmonary hypertension
- Type 2 diabetes
- Fatigue related driving and workplace accidents

If you are experiencing signs and symptoms or have high risk factors for sleep apnea, call us today at (210) 655-4400 to speak with one of our representatives. We can answer your questions and schedule you for a Home Sleep Test.