

SNORING IS NOT JUST A NOISE SLEEP APNEA CAN CAUSE SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEMS

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Snoring is a serious problem for the bed partner and has a negative effect on many relationships. When the bed partner is deprived of an adequate night sleep this can result in separate bedrooms and in some cases even contribute to a divorce. The combination of extreme daytime fatigue due to sleep apnea can cause sexual dysfunction including decreased interest in sex and sometimes impotence. Many patients who snore and are extremely tired during the daytime also have a condition called sleep apnea. The diagnosis of sleep apnea must be made by a sleep specialist when the patient goes for an overnight sleep study. A patient with sleep apnea will stop breathing sometimes 20-30 times per hour. It is small wonder that patients are extremely tired during the daytime when they are not getting a proper restful sleep.

Three treatment options for sleep apnea:

1. Oral Appliances
2. CPAP Device (Continuous Positive Air Pressure)
3. Surgical removal of structures obstructing the airway

The CPAP device consists of an air compressor and a hose which blows air up the patient's nose all night through a mask that is worn over the nose or the whole face. The CPAP device is recommended for severe sleep apnea patients. The problem is that approximately 70% of patients cannot wear this device and many are not aware of the alternative oral appliance treatment. Many patients cannot tolerate the CPAP device due to claustrophobic, mask irritation, headaches, air in stomach, dry nose, nasal congestion, dry throat and sound of the air compressor.

Oral appliances are extremely effective in eliminating snoring and sleep apnea particularly in the less serious cases. Oral appliances are similar to a custom mouth guard that fits over the upper and lower teeth. They function by gently moving the lower jaw forward to open the airway which stops the snoring and sleep apnea. They are also utilized for patients with severe sleep apnea who cannot wear the CPAP device. Oral appliances have a high success rate and are much easier to wear and to travel with compared with the CPAP device.

Sleep apnea is a medical condition that needs to be taken seriously. There is a direct correlation between patients who have sleep apnea which is a direct cause of several medical disorders.

Summary of medical problems due to sleep apnea;

- Hypertension 40 – 50%
- Coronary heart disease 34%
- Congestive heart failure 34%

- Diabetes 65%
- Erectile dysfunction 50%
- Renal disease 50%
- Fibromyalgia 80%
- Nocturnal strokes 84%

Patients who have many of these medical disorders as listed above should contact their medical doctor and ask for a referral to a sleep clinic for a sleep study. If they are diagnosed with sleep apnea they must seek treatment immediately with oral appliances, CPAP or surgery. Conversely, if you snore and have excessive daytime sleepiness you may have sleep apnea. These patients should also ask their medical doctor for a referral to determine the presence or absence of sleep apnea. If you are diagnosed and treated early, patients can normally avoid all the unpleasant medical problems as listed earlier.

Today it is important that patients take responsibility for their own health. The problem is that most medical and dental schools do not adequately train medical doctors and dentists to be able to recognize and treat sleep apnea. Patients need to find MD's and dentists who have special training in the area of sleep disorders such as snoring and sleep apnea in order to obtain the necessary treatment.

The greatest risk for sleep apnea is still the overweight male over age 65, however, it has been estimated that over 50% of men over 50 snore and approximately 30% have sleep apnea. Women, after menopause or during pregnancy are also susceptible to sleep apnea. There is also some research that indicates that a woman with severe sleep apnea who is not receiving enough oxygen at night may also be harming the fetus. Certainly we know that pregnant women who smoke, drink alcohol or take drugs can cause harm to the unborn fetus. It now appears that lack of oxygen for the mother can cause permanent adverse health problems for the fetus.

Children can also have sleep apnea with negative side effects. Sometimes this causes ADHA (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) which results in hyperactivity, aggressiveness, poor school performance, bed wetting, less growth potential, poor sleep and lower athlete performance. The main cause is a narrow constricted upper arch which can be solved with an oral appliance to widen the upper arch. Other causes are enlarged adenoids and tonsils which must be removed by an ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialist). If you know of any children that snore and have any of the above symptoms they should be referred to an MD and dentist who treat sleep apnea.

Patients must be aware that snoring and particularly sleep apnea is a serious medical disorder that can reduce the quality of life if left untreated. As mentioned previously, sleep apnea increases the risks of high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, Type 2 Diabetes, acid reflux. Sleep apnea, which causes extreme daytime fatigue, has also been linked to an increased number of motor vehicle accidents as well as work related accidents. Other

unpleasant side effects of sleep apnea include morning headaches, loss of memory, impotence, and inability to lose weight, as well as frequent visit the bathroom at night due to frequent awakenings. Sleep apnea is indeed a serious health issue. It can also affect the length of your life. Research has stated that patients with severe sleep apnea will die 8-10 years sooner than a patient that does not have this medical disorder. Since it has been estimated that 30% of the adult population either snores or has sleep apnea, I think that it is important that the public, MD's and dentists take the problem seriously. The quality of your life and the length of your life may be dependant upon you doing so. The good news is that it is totally treatable and oral appliances are extremely comfortable and effective.