



What is **Sleep Apnea?**

Apnea is a sleep disorder characterized by abnormal pauses in breathing—or instances of abnormally low breathing—during sleep. Each pause in breathing can last from a few seconds up to whole minutes, and may occur 5 to 30 times (or more) in an hour.

- > There are three types of sleep apnea: central sleep apnea (CSA), obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), and complex or mixed sleep apnea (a combination of CSA and OSA).
- > CSA is breathing interrupted by a lack of respiratory effort.
- > OSA is breathing interrupted by a physical block to airflow despite respiratory effort.
- > 84% of sleep apnea is OSA, making it the most common.
- > People who suffer from sleep apnea are rarely aware of having difficulty breathing, even upon waking. It is usually only recognized by a partner or friend who has witnessed an episode.
- > People with low muscle tone and soft tissue around the airway because of obesity are at a heightened risk for OSA.
- > Researchers revealed that people with OSA show tissue loss in brain regions that help store memory, linking OSA with memory loss.

Symptoms of sleep apnea:

- > Daytime sleepiness/fatigue
- > Snoring
- > Restless sleep
- > Awakening with dry mouth or sore throat
- > 1 in 4 patients with OSA suffers from nighttime teeth grinding

How do you know if you have sleep apnea?

- > Common indicators of sleep apnea include: obesity BMI greater than 30, large neck (16 inches for women, 17 inches for men), enlarged tonsils, large tongue, morning headaches, irritability/mood swings/depressions, learning and or memory difficulties, and sexual dysfunction.
- > The ending of an apneic event may be accompanied by a number of mouth phenomena, such as snoring, gasps, mumbles, and teeth grinding.
- > Men are more likely to suffer from sleep apnea than women, at a 3-to-1 ratio.
- > Risk of OSA rises with increase in body weight, active smoking, and age.
- > Diabetics or borderline diabetics are up to 3 times more likely to have OSA.

Treatment Options

- > Lifestyle change, avoiding alcohol or muscle relaxants, losing weight, and quitting smoking
- > Various kinds of oral appliances to keep the airway open during sleep
- > Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP)
- > Surgical procedures to remove and tighten tissue and widen the airway

How is sleep apnea related to your mouth?

Patients with mild to moderate sleep apnea who use oral appliances at night have shown a significant reduction in symptoms, particularly if they sleep on their backs or stomachs. These patients sleep better and snore less. Oral appliances may also improve airflow for some patients with severe apnea, and they have a higher compliance rate than the CPAP.

Resources

<http://www.sleepfoundation.org>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com>

<http://www.chestnet.org>