

How to Recognize OSA and What It Means for Your Health

What is obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)?

OSA is a common disorder that causes people to temporarily stop or decrease breathing repeatedly during sleep. It affects up to 14% of people.

If I snore, does that mean I have OSA?

Not necessarily. There are many reasons people snore, but snoring is common in almost everyone who has OSA. Other signs and symptoms of OSA include:

- Gasping for air while sleeping
- Morning headache
- Daytime sleepiness
- High blood pressure
- Depression

What causes OSA?

It can happen for many reasons, but increasing age and obesity are the most common risk factors. A neck size of 16 inches or greater is a risk for OSA. Also, men are three times more likely to have OSA than women.

How do I know if I have it?

Your doctor will take a careful history and do a physical exam. You or your doctor can complete a screening checklist. If your doctor thinks you have OSA, the diagnosis can be

made by sleep studies either at your home or at a special sleep center.

How is it treated?

The standard treatment for OSA is a machine called CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure). CPAP uses pressurized air to keep the airway open at night. Most CPAP machines are about 12 × 6 × 6 inches, and weigh between 4 and 8 lb. While you sleep, you will wear a mask that connects to the CPAP machine. Some masks fit over the mouth and nose. Other masks fit over the nose only.

I don't like wearing my CPAP. Are there other treatment options?

Yes. The first option is to try different mask fittings for your CPAP. Your doctor may also suggest a BiPAP (bilevel positive airway pressure) machine, which may be more comfortable. CPAP forces air at a continuous pressure, but BiPAP forces air at higher pressures when you breathe in and at lower pressures when you breathe out. In rare cases, some people may also consider dental fittings or surgery to treat OSA. For people who are obese, weight loss may be helpful as well.



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How to Recognize OSA (continued)

What happens if I don't get treated for OSA?

Untreated OSA may lead to serious health conditions or problems such as:

- Heart disease, including heart failure
- Stroke
- Hypertension (not controlled with medicine)
- Depression
- Increased risk of motor vehicle crashes
- Overall increased risk of death

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Sleep Apnea Association

<http://www.sleepapnea.org/>

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/sleepapnea/>

National Institute of Neurological Disorders

and Stroke

http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/sleep_apnea/sleep_apnea.htm

National Library of Medicine

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000811.htm>

National Sleep Foundation

<https://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-disorders-problems/sleep-apnea>

Notes:

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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