

Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is a sleep-related breathing disorder that is thought to affect between 2 and 4 percent of the adult population. It is diagnosed more often in men, those over 40, and those who are overweight.

Sleep apnea is characterized by multiple respiratory pauses during sleep. These pauses, or “apneas,” are defined as periods of 10 seconds or longer during which the sleeper stops breathing altogether. Other, milder respiratory events during sleep known as “hypopneas” are defined as periods lasting 10 seconds or longer during which breathing is significantly reduced. Most people with sleep apnea will have periods of abnormal breathing that last between 30 and 40 seconds more than 400 times per night. So the average person with sleep apnea spends more than 3 hours a night when he’s not breathing normally – or not breathing at all!

People with sleep apnea report a number of symptoms that they often fail to identify as problems, and thus miss detection by healthcare professionals. (A spouse or bed partner often provides helpful information about the sleep and daytime functioning of the sufferer.)

Symptoms of sleep apnea include:

- Loud snoring
- Snoring interrupted by gasping, snorting, or choking
- Excessive daytime sleepiness, often with the tendency to fall sleep in inappropriate situations such as while at work, while watching movies, or while driving
- Trouble with attention, concentration, or memory
- Low mood, depression, or irritability
- Loss of sexual interest, impotence (in men), or menstrual irregularities (in women)
- “Acid stomach,” or heartburn at night
- Dry mouth upon awakening
- Headaches upon awakening
- Nausea upon awakening
- Frequent nighttime urination or even bedwetting



Sleep apnea is associated with significant health and safety risks:

High blood pressure. One review of the medical literature reports that approximately 6 of every 10 people with sleep apnea suffer from high blood pressure.

Irregular heartbeats. Heart rhythms that are either too slow or too fast, or rhythms that are abnormal (such as premature ventricular contractions, or PVCs) occur in about half of those with sleep apnea.

Stroke is approximately 10 times greater in those with sleep apnea than those without. Low blood oxygen, a common occurrence in people with sleep apnea, appears to be associated with a number of medical problems. This condition may result in seizure during sleep.

Death rates are higher in those with sleep apnea or untreated than those without.

Excessive daytime sleepiness. Sleepiness is a “hallmark” of sleep apnea, and often results in impaired daytime functioning. People with sleep apnea may be at greater risk of accidents or injuries due to fatigue. For example, people with sleep apnea are five times more likely to be involved in a fatigue-related motor vehicle accident than healthy individuals.

There are many treatments for sleep apnea. If you think you have sleep apnea, the first step is to talk to your doctor. You may be referred to a sleep laboratory for overnight evaluation. Additional information may be found at www.clinilabs.com, and patient information brochures may be obtained by calling 212-994-5100.

Clinilabs Sleep Disorders Institute is a full-service sleep disorders center, with locations in Manhattan and Westchester, that specializes in the evaluation and treatment of disorders of sleep and wakefulness in adults and children. At the leading edge of clinical service, the Institute provides standards of care not available at other sleep centers. The Institute's main facility is accredited by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, and our offices are affiliated with New York's finest hospitals.

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