

Snoring

Snoring is an audible and typically recurrent sound that is produced by some sleepers. It is more common in men, and is much more likely to occur as we get older. One study has shown that more than 60% of men and more than 40% of women over the age of 60 describe themselves as regular snorers. While gentle snoring usually doesn't give rise to many complaints, loud snoring can be quite annoying to one's spouse or bed partner, and can be the source of strained relationships. Historical sources note that some men have been shot in their sleep by neighbors who could no longer tolerate their snoring!

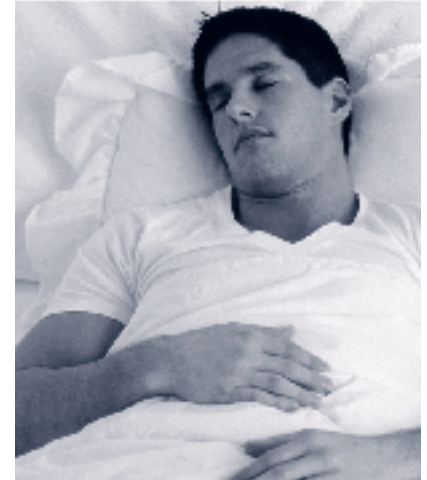
Snoring sounds are produced by air passing over the soft tissue in the upper airway as the sleeper breathes in and out. Snoring occurs during sleep, and not during wakefulness, because the muscles that keep the upper airway open automatically relax during sleep. The soft tissue in the airway (areas such as the uvula, tonsils, and soft palate) actually sag down into the airway opening, and the air passing over these areas causes them to vibrate and make that unmistakable snoring sound.

Risk factors for snoring include: obesity (overweight), hypothyroidism (low thyroid function), and tobacco use. Some people are born with a small or narrow airway, while others have conditions that interfere with normal breathing (such as nasal polyps or deviated septum). In either case, snoring is more likely to occur. Snoring also can arise with sleep deprivation, with common colds or allergies, when sleeping on one's back, or as a result of the use of alcohol or certain sleeping pills.

Most snoring probably is not associated with health concerns, but is a problem that snorers and their loved ones would like resolved. Simple treatments include weight loss, avoidance of alcohol or sleep aids that relax muscles, treatment of nasal congestion or allergies, or the use of over-the-counter devices such as tape strips that help open your nasal passages. Every spouse of a snorer can tell you that sleeping on your side also reduces the likelihood of snoring. Some people can sleep on their sides at will; others might want to try using an old tennis ball sewn into the center of the back of a T-shirt, which "reminds" the sleeper to roll over whenever he's on his back. Oral appliances, usually fit by a dentist, may be helpful. Finally, a variety of surgical procedures provided by Ear, Nose, and Throat specialists can provide a long-term solution to the problem of snoring.

Snoring actually may be a health concern for some. Medical reports have shown that snoring is associated with a sleep-related breathing disorder known as "sleep apnea." Approximately five out of every 100 snorers has sleep apnea, a very serious medical condition that is associated with breathing pauses during sleep (see Sleep Apnea fact sheet). People with sleep apnea often suffer from debilitating daytime fatigue and sleepiness, and they are at significantly greater risk than others for stroke, irregular heartbeats, high blood pressure, and death. The treatment plan for a person with sleep apnea is quite different from one for an individual with simple snoring, so medical evaluation and follow-up care is essential.

For more information about snoring please speak to your doctor. Additional information may be found at www.clinilabs.com, and patient information booklets are available 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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