

SNORING AND SLEEP APNEA SOLUTION with added benefits

Dear Dr McCrummen: I really enjoy the thorough, detailed, and often fun information you provide in your column. Can you write about things that dentists can do about snoring? My husband's snoring drives me out of the room. N.K.

Approximately 10% of adults snore. About 1% of those have a life threatening disorder called Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA). It is currently suggested if a person has a snoring or sleep apnea problem that they see a dentist for primary treatment. Often a person contacts a physician first for these problems and they may suggest drugs that can dry the mouth (which can increase cavities), surgery, or wearing an expensive and often very uncomfortable CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) unit that forces air through the nose into the lungs. CPAP machines are expensive for individuals without insurance coverage, increases insurance premiums, and taxes our Medicare system, when a simple, and relatively inexpensive dental device usually solves the problem.

CPAP machine therapy is rejected 50-80% of the time. Some people find that they must sleep on their back while they are hooked up to the ventilator that has tubes which can get tangled. The user must wear a tight band around the head to keep a seal around the nose or face mask, and it makes noise through the night that can be just as annoying as snoring. It can be a very uncomfortable solution that totally changes a person's sleeping experience, as well as those next to them, for the rest of their life. A person becomes dependant on the machine and will require it when they travel. There are some easier, less expensive, simpler options to try first, with a higher success rate.

Snoring disturbs a sleeping mate and leads to their loss of a restful night's sleep. Sleep apnea (apnea, meaning "without breath") affects the person's rest and can lead to constant tiredness, high blood pressure and heart disease, memory problems, weight gain, impotency, headaches, job impairment, accidents related to fatigue, and contributes to grumpiness. It is as common as adult diabetes, and is most common in men over the age of 40, especially over age 60, though can affect both genders and all ages.

Rarely related to brain breathing centers, which would require a CPAP, the most common cause of sleep apnea is the obstruction caused by the tongue closing off the back of the throat. This is more common with people as they age when the soft palate (as well as all skin) generally loses its tone and firmness, and with overweight people due to extra fat enlarging the oral tissues. It is also more common in people with large necks (17"+), having large tonsils or adenoids, after menopause, family history, and after the use of tobacco, alcohol, sedatives, or tranquilizers. The soft palate and tongue often seals off the breathing passage when sleeping on the back. Snoring sounds come from the rattle of the soft palate flapping against the back of the throat.

Apnea and snoring are often very simply treated with a dental device that is comfortably worn at night to keep the jaw slightly forward, and fits like an orthodontic retainer. It is simple to wear, simple to carry on trips, and no noise is produced. Our patients have stated much comfort and ease of wearing it, spouses (roommates) have praised us, and it very often solves snoring and apnea problems.

If you have a snoring or sleep apnea problem ask your dentist what they can do for you. An added benefit reportedly seems to be a simple 10% loss of weight, while wearing a snoring or orthodontic device.

"The past 50 years have demonstrated more change than the previous 500 years, and those 500 years witnessed more advances than the previous 5,000 years" *Dentistry Today Nov. 2006*