

Snoring or Sleep Apnea?

It's 3 a.m., and your partner is snoring. Again. While sometimes seen as a laughable condition, there's nothing funny about snoring.

Not everyone realizes the dangers that may be faced by someone with a serious snoring condition. This seemingly innocent problem can actually degenerate into sleep apnea, a chronic sleep disorder that can cause numerous negative health effects. If you are a snorer, it's important to find out whether or not you may have sleep apnea. Left untreated, this condition can be quite damaging to your health.

If you think that you might have sleep apnea, ask yourself a few basic questions. If you're not sure of the answers, ask your partner for his or her insight.

- * Do you snore on a regular basis?
- * Does your snoring wake you or your partner at night?
- * Do you ever wake up in the night, choking or gasping for air?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you may be suffering with sleep apnea.

Apnea occurs when there is a blockage of the airway, serious enough to actually halt breathing for ten seconds or even longer. A person with apnea can wake up a number of times throughout the evening. This regular disruption of sleep will leave him or her feeling irritable and unable to concentrate the next day.

Some people who suffer severe cases of sleep apnea may wake as many as 100 times per night. Those afflicted will often rise with headaches due to lack of oxygen. Morning headache is a sure symptom of apnea, along with rapid weight gain, memory loss, depression, changes in personality and a short attention span.

If these conditions sound familiar, you may want to speak to your doctor about the possibility that you suffer with sleep apnea. You can also use a tape recorder to record yourself breathing while you sleep. If you notice frequent breathing cessations, consider going to the hospital for a polysomnography test. During this overnight study your sleep will be monitored, allowing your doctor to make a proper diagnosis. Insurance carriers often cover this harmless test.

A sleep diary can also be useful in pre-diagnosing sleep apnea. Your bed partner will keep a sleep diary kit on hand, consisting of a notebook, pen and flashlight. If and when your snoring wakes your bed partner, he or she will make note of certain factors of your sleeping. The diary notation should record whether or not you are snoring, how loud your snoring is, whether you are asleep or not, and whether or not you seem to be having trouble breathing. This simple notebook can really help you to understand the extent of your problem.

If left untreated, sleep apnea can lead to an increased risk of heart problems or stroke. And that's certainly no laughing matter.