

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)

Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) is a condition involving breathing difficulty during sleep. This usually occurs when the tissues and muscles in the back of the throat relax too much while sleeping, causing the air passage in your throat to narrow or block off. Your breathing slows down or stops completely, and then you wake up, take a few breaths and fall back to sleep again. People with obstructive sleep apnea do not know they stop breathing when they are asleep but others may tell them that they have snoring or even pauses in breathing during sleep.

What are the symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea?

People with obstructive sleep apnea may have snoring, tiredness, and daytime sleepiness. However, some people with sleep apnea do not have any symptoms or may not realize they have them. Other symptoms may include:

- Restless sleep
- Waking up gasping or choking
- Morning headaches, dry mouth, or sore throat
- Waking up often to urinate at night
- Waking up feeling unrefreshed
- Trouble thinking clearly or remembering things

What causes obstructive sleep apnea?

- Being overweight may cause the air passage to be smaller
- Increasing age
- Certain neck and jaw shapes are prone to a narrow air passage (such as receding chin)
- Enlarged tonsils and adenoids may block the air passage

- Use of alcohol or sedatives, which relaxes the muscles in the throat

Is there a test for obstructive sleep apnea?

Yes. If your provider suspects that you have sleep apnea they might send you for a “sleep study.” For the study, you are hooked up to different machines that monitor your heart rate, breathing, and other body functions. The results of the test will tell if you have the disorder.

Is obstructive sleep apnea dangerous?

It can be. People with sleep apnea do not get good-quality sleep, so they are often tired and less alert. This puts them at risk for car accidents and other types of accidents. Plus, studies show that people with sleep apnea are more likely than others to have:

- High blood pressure
- Heart attacks
- Other serious heart problems

How is obstructive sleep apnea treated?

The most effective treatment for sleep apnea is a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) device or a Bilevel Positive Airway Pressure device (BiPAP). These are very similar and keep your airway open while you sleep.

What is CPAP/BiPAP?

CPAP or BiPAP are the best treatments for obstructive sleep apnea. They are the first treatment choices and the most widely used. CPAP/BiPAP are small machines that you use at home every night while you sleep. They increase air pressure in your throat to keep your airway open.

The CPAP/BiPAP machine and mask will have **one** of the following:

- A mask that covers your nose and mouth
- Prongs that fit into your nose

- A mask that covers your nose only

How does it help?

CPAP/BiPAP devices can:

- Help you have more normal sleep, so you feel less sleepy and more alert during the daytime
- Keep heart failure or other heart problems from getting worse
- Possibly help lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk for heart attacks, strokes, and other health problems
- Help your bed partner sleep better because you are not snoring or restless

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