



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance professionals at Deutsch & Associates, LLC

Lifestyle changes that promote a healthy body weight can reduce the incidence of sleep apnea. Reducing your weight relieves the pressure on your airway and allows your body to breathe a bit easier.

SLEEP APNEA

According to the Mayo Clinic, more than 12 million Americans suffer from obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). Those who suffer from the condition start and stop breathing several times a night when their throat muscles relax and block their airways. OSA is the most frequently occurring form of sleep apnea compared to the far less common central sleep apnea, a condition in which the brain actually fails to signal muscles to breathe as a result of instability in the respiratory control center.

Symptoms of OSA

- Excessive sleepiness during the daytime (known as hypersomnia)
- Loud snoring
- Observed episodes of stopped breathing during sleep
- Abrupt awakenings while sleeping accompanied by a shortness of breath
- Waking with a sore throat and/or dry mouth
- Morning headaches
- Trouble staying asleep (known as insomnia)

Causes

OSA occurs when the muscles that support soft tissue in the throat relax. This causes the airway to narrow and close, and breathing is then momentarily restricted for approximately 10 to 20 seconds. This can lower the level of oxygen in the blood.

When the brain senses an inability to breathe, it briefly rouses you from your sleep so your airway can reopen. Often, this episode is not memorable because it only lasts for a brief moment.

Risks for Developing OSA

OSA can affect anyone, but certain people may be at a higher risk, such as:

- Overweight individuals – Fat deposits around the upper airway can obstruct breathing.
- Those with a thick neck circumference – A neck greater than 17 inches may narrow the airway in the throat.
- Those with high blood pressure
- Those with narrow airways or enlarged tonsils or adenoids
- Sufferers of chronic nasal congestion
- Diabetics
- Males
- African Americans, Hispanics and Pacific Islanders
- Those older than 65
- Women who are menopausal or postmenopausal
- Those with a family history of sleep apnea
- Those using alcohol, sedatives or tranquilizers
- Smokers

Contact a Doctor

If you experience any of the following symptoms or your partner notices any of the following behaviors, consult your physician:

- Snoring that is disturbing and loud
- Shortness of breath that disturbs your sleep
- Intermittent pauses in breathing during sleep
- Excessive drowsiness during waking hours
- Snoring that is intermittent with periods of silence
- Snoring that is loudest when sleeping on your back and decreases when you roll to your side

Diagnosing OSA

After contacting your doctor about your sleep problems, he or

SIMPLE TIPS FOR HEALTHY SNACKING

she may make an evaluation based on your symptoms and will likely refer you to a sleep clinic. Once there, a sleep specialist will determine the next course of action, such as overnight monitoring. Your doctor may also refer you to an ear, nose and throat specialist (otolaryngologist) who can check for a blockage in the nose and throat. This problem can also cause sleep apnea.

Complications

OSA is not an isolated condition; it can lead to the far more serious health problems such as:

- *Cardiovascular problems – Sudden drops in oxygen in the blood increase blood pressure, which puts a strain on the cardiovascular system. This heightens the risk of heart failure and stroke. If sufferers already have heart disease, frequent low blood oxygen levels can lead to sudden death from a heart attack.*
- *Daytime fatigue – Sufferers may experience extreme fatigue during waking hours. This can lead to concentration problems while at work, driving or taking care of children.*
- *Complications during surgery and while taking some medications – Sufferers are more likely to have complications during surgery because they already have breathing difficulties, especially while lying on their backs.*
- *Memory problems*
- *Extreme headaches*
- *Feelings of depression*
- *Needing to urinate frequently during the evening*

Treatment Options

For those who suffer from moderate to severe OSA, doctors may recommend wearing a nasal continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device. These machines are placed over the nose and deliver just enough air pressure to keep the upper airway passage open, which prevents apnea and snoring.

For mild OSA sufferers, doctors may recommend simple lifestyle changes, such as the following:

- *Losing weight*
- *Avoiding alcohol and medications (tranquilizers and sleeping pills)*
- *Sleeping on your side or stomach rather than your back*
- *Using a nasal spray to keep your nasal passages open*

If symptoms worsen, surgery may be necessary to correct the problem.