

More on Snoring and Sleep Apnea

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By Dr. Derek Conte

Snoring and sleep apnea are not only very problematic for sufferers, but also for that sufferer's partner. These problems have been known not only to destroy one's health but their partner's too, even to the extent of ruining relationships. Apnea can prevent reaching the deep sleep levels necessary for dreaming, which organizes and processes learned material, and allows for growth and tissue repair. Know this: Deep sleep is vital to good health!

First, let's review a little. Snoring is the vibration of the uvula at the back of the throat - the part the doctor is checking when he tells you to "open your mouth and say 'AHHH'" - that vibrates when the speed of the air moving over it is just right and the airway is reduced by overweight, opioid/alcohol use, nasal problems or small jaw structure. The risk factors for snoring and for sleep apnea are similar and can exist at the same time in people.

Sleep apnea literally means "without breathing" and is the cessation of breathing at a point, many points, or even hundreds of points during sleep. "Obstructive" apnea is self-explanatory and far more common than "Central" apnea, which is a problem with the breathing signal coming from the brainstem. With Obstructive apnea the airway collapses, waking up the sufferer gasping for air. This can be alarming, but it is also potentially health threatening by lowering brain oxygen, raising the blood pressure, which strains the heart, and by daytime fatigue and long-term sleep deprivation which can lower immune function and compromise mental performance.

There are products on the market that used to be approved ONLY for snoring but seemed to work well for apnea too. Now, some of these products are also (happily) approved for apnea.

One product type, covered in an earlier article here, is a moldable plastic mouthpiece which is softened in hot water and then set by clamping down with the lower jaw in the protruded (forward) position. This keeps the airway open during sleep. Another product has been the nasal wire strips which adhere to the outside bridge of the nose, opening the nasal passage. We see football players use them when playing to increase air intake.

More recently, there is a device made of soft, short rubber ½" tubes, loosely connected by a rubber strip. These are put inside the nostrils, imparting a slight stretch, increasing airflow substantially. This seems to work very well and, in combination with the mouthpiece device, helping two problems simultaneously: preventing the collapse of the soft palate and increasing the volume of air.

Another thing that may be overlooked and still a factor in snoring and apnea might be an allergic reaction to something in the bedroom which would cause swelling in the mucous membranes of nasal passage or in the back of the throat where large lymph glands are located. It could be anything allergenic, from the carpet or lampshade to the blankets, sheets or pillows. Many people have allergies to foams, latex, feathers or dust. Everything should be considered. Sometimes the problem is right under our noses, so to speak.

Remember that apnea can be a serious problem and is considered to be a medical condition, so getting a consult with your primary MD would be a good idea. They may say the inconvenient and cumbersome CPAP or BPAP machine is not necessary for you.

Dr. Derek Conte is co-founder of Chiropractic Specialists at 1154 Concord Road in Smyrna and available to speak to your group or workplace. Questions: Call 404-784-6008. For more articles, info, photos, go to drderekconte.com

