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### Snoring, sleeping disorders, and sleep apnea in adults

Heavy snorers should seek medical advice to ensure that sleep apnea is not a problem. Treatment depends on diagnosis. An examination may reveal if obstructive sleep apnea, nasal allergy, infection, deformity, or enlarged tonsils and adenoids cause snoring.

What causes snoring?

The sounds of snoring occur when there is obstruction to the free flow of air through the passages at the back of the mouth and nose.

Adults who suffer from mild or occasional snoring should

- 1) Reduce weight with increased activity and healthy eating habits
- 2) Avoid sleep pills and antihistamines before bedtime
- 3) Avoid alcohol for at least 4 hours before bedtime and heavy meals or snacks for 3 hours before retiring
- 4) Establish regular sleep patterns
- 5) Sleep on your side rather than back
- 6) Tilt the head of bed upwards 4 inches

Sleep apnea

Patients with snoring should be evaluated for sleep apnea. Sleep apnea disrupts the sleep pattern and deprives the snorer of appropriate rest. When snoring is severe, it can cause serious long-term health problems.

Significant episodes last more than 10 seconds each and occur more than 7 times per hour. Seriously affected patients may experience hundreds of such events per night. These episodes can reduce oxygen levels in the blood, causing cardiac and circulation problems.

A sleep study or polysomnogram is necessary to record the nature, duration, and frequency of the breathing disturbances.

The immediate effect of sleep apnea is that the snorer is forced to sleep lightly to keep muscles tense in order to maintain airflow to the lungs. Because such a snorer does not get enough deep restful sleep, he awakens unrefreshed, has daytime fatigue, may be a sleepy driver, and work effectiveness may suffer.

Long-term sequelae of untreated sleep apnea include high blood pressure and cardiac/pulmonary failure. Treatment may include continued positive airway pressure (CPAP) or even surgery.