

Understanding Sleep Apnea



What is Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)?

OSA afflicts 20 million adult men and women in the U.S. People who have OSA stop breathing repeatedly during sleep because the airway collapses. Airway collapse may be due to such factors as a large tongue, extra tissue in the airway, or decreased muscle tone holding the airway open. As a result, air is prevented from getting into the lungs.



Normal Breathing



Obstructive Sleep Apnea

These pauses in breathing can happen 30 times or more per hour. When healthy sleep is interrupted in this way, it puts a strain on the heart and can lead to a number of serious health conditions.

How do I know if I have OSA?

OSA can occur in men, women and children of all ages and sizes. Most people who have OSA do not realize they suffer from the condition. Often, it is someone else who witnesses the first signs of OSA.

If you or someone you know snores regularly and has one or more of the following symptoms, it may be OSA. Check all of the following that apply, and share this list with your doctor.

Key signs and symptoms include:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Loud or disruptive snoring
- Gasping or choking during sleep

Other common symptoms include:

- Grogginess and morning headaches
- Frequent urination at night
- Depression and irritability
- Obesity
- Large neck or crowding of the upper airway
- Post-menopausal women

What happens if I have OSA and I don't treat it properly?

People who do not seek diagnosis and effective treatment for OSA can be at risk for:

- High blood pressure
- Irregular heart rhythms or heart disease
- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Increased likelihood of driving or work-related accidents

How is OSA Diagnosed?

- Discuss sleep complaints and symptoms with your doctor.
- If a sleep disorder is suspected, your doctor will refer you to a sleep specialist for evaluation.
- An overnight diagnostic sleep study, known as a polysomnogram, or PSG, is used to determine the type and severity of the sleep disorder, as well as appropriate treatment.

What is the treatment for OSA?

- Positive Airway Pressure (PAP) therapy is the treatment of choice for OSA.
- PAP therapy provides a gentle flow of air pressure through your nose using a mask.
- The air pressure prevents airway collapse, allowing you to breathe freely while you sleep.
- PAP therapy is noninvasive and can alleviate the symptoms of OSA when used as prescribed.



Obstructive Sleep Apnea



PAP Therapy

CPAP – The Treatment of Choice

- Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) is the most commonly used PAP therapy.
- CPAP provides a continuous stream of air pressure to keep your airway open.
- Most CPAP systems feature a ramp button which will start the pressure at a lower level and gradually “ramp” the pressure up to your prescribed pressure in order to assist you with falling asleep more comfortably.

Alternative Treatments

- Bi-level PAP (with a Bi-Level machine) may be prescribed for severe cases of OSA.
- Auto-PAP (auto-adjusting CPAP or BiPAP) adjusts the pressure as you sleep according to your needs.
- Surgery
- Body position modification
- Oral appliances

What are the benefits of regular treatment?

Regular use of PAP treatment can minimize the impact of OSA. The benefits of regular nightly use of PAP treatment may include:

- Increased energy and attentiveness during the day
- Lower blood pressure
- Decreased risk of strokes and heart attacks
- Increased effectiveness at home or at work
- Improved overall quality of life

Keys to Effective Treatment for OSA

During the initial weeks of therapy, you may encounter problems adjusting to the therapy. The problems are easy to correct if communicated to your homecare provider.

Mask Discomfort

- Red marks – loosen the headgear.
- Mask leak – adjust the headgear until the leak stops.
- Difficulty with fitting properly – adjust the headgear, or ask your homecare provider for another size or type of mask.

Discomfort with Nose or Mouth

Some discomfort with your nose or mouth will resolve over time. If it doesn't, try these suggestions:

- drink plenty of water
- use saline nasal spray
- try nasal decongestants
- ask your homecare provider to add a humidifier to your PAP device
- ask your homecare provider for a chin strap

Discomfort with Airway Pressure

Comfort settings, such as a ramp or flex, may help you adapt to the pressure. Ask your homecare provider if these settings are included in your device.

Living with OSA

It is important to be an active participant in your care, and focus on the benefits of treatment. PAP therapy is a treatment, not a cure.

- Use your therapy device each and every night, even if you travel. Sleep apnea will return on nights when therapy is not used.
- Be patient and persistent while you adjust to therapy.
- Talk to your doctor or homecare provider about any issues or side effects you may encounter.
- Seek support from loved ones, local patient groups, or internet resources.
- Consider lifestyle changes, such as weight loss (if needed), good sleep practices, and avoidance of alcohol, sedatives and hypnotics.

Important:

If signs or symptoms of OSA return after you start to use PAP therapy, contact your doctor to discuss your treatment.

What Patients Are Saying

"Once I started acclimating and getting better with the treatment, the benefits were significant. It really made a significant improvement in my life."

Matthew A.

Lafayette, LA

"It (CPAP therapy) helps you get control over your health. It just makes you feel better about yourself. Who doesn't want to be a happy family person? Who doesn't want to be a good employee?"

Dee S.

Lafayette, LA

"I'm going to be on medication all my life for hypertension. But since I've started using the CPAP machine my blood pressure has gone down. I'm still on medication but I'm on a lower dose."

Peggy J.

Pittsburgh, PA

"If you're using therapy every night and don't feel better, something is wrong. Find out what's wrong and fix it."

Raul G.

Chicago, IL

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