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Sleep Apnea

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Sleep apnea is a serious [sleep](#) disorder that occurs when a person's breathing is interrupted during sleep. People with untreated sleep apnea stop breathing repeatedly during their sleep, sometimes hundreds of times. This means the brain -- a the rest of the body -- may not get enough oxygen.

There are two types of sleep apnea:

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA): The more common of the two forms of apnea, it is caused by a blockage of the airway, usually when the soft tissue in the back of the throat collapses during sleep.

Central sleep apnea: Unlike OSA, the airway is not blocked, but the brain fails to signal the muscles to breathe due to instability in the respiratory control center.

Am I at Risk for Sleep Apnea?

Sleep apnea can affect anyone at any age, even children. Risk factors for sleep apnea include:

- Being male
- Being overweight
- Being over age 40
- Having a large neck size (17 inches or greater in men and 16 inches or greater in women)
- Having large tonsils, a large tongue, or a small jaw bone
- Having a family history of sleep apnea
- Gastroesophageal reflux, or GERD
- Nasal obstruction due to a deviated septum, allergies, or sinus problems

Recommended Related to Sleep Apnea

[Apnea, Sleep](#)

Important It is possible that the main title of the report Apnea, Sleep is not the name you expected. Please check the synonyms listing to find the alternate name(s) and disorder subdivision(s) covered by this report.

[Read the Apnea, Sleep article >>](#)

What Are the Effects of Sleep Apnea?

If left untreated, sleep apnea can result in a growing number of health problems, including:

- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Heart failure, irregular heart beats, and heart attacks
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Worsening of ADHD

In addition, untreated sleep apnea may be responsible for poor performance in everyday activities, such as at work and school, motor vehicle crashes, and academic underachievement in children and adolescents.

Top Picks

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- [6 Common Sleep Positions & What They Mean](#)
- [The Truth About Coffee](#)
- [Natural Remedies for Dry Mouth](#)
- [ADHD and Sleep Problems](#)
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WebMD Medical Reference

SOURCES:

The National Sleep Foundation.

National Institutes of Health.

Reviewed by Louis R. Chanin, MD on July 30, 2012

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