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Definition

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Obstructive sleep apnea is a potentially serious sleep disorder in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep.

Several types of sleep apnea exist, but the most common type is obstructive sleep apnea, which occurs when your throat muscles intermittently relax and block your airway during sleep. The most noticeable sign of obstructive sleep apnea is snoring.

Anyone can develop obstructive sleep apnea, although it most commonly affects middle-aged and older adults and people who are overweight.

Obstructive sleep apnea treatment may involve using a device to keep your airway open or using a mouthpiece to thrust your jaw forward during sleep. Some people undergo a procedure to change the structure of their nose, mouth or throat.

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