

## SLEEP APNEA

### What is sleep apnea?

Sleep apnea is a common serious problem when a person pauses in breathing or takes shallow breaths while sleeping. Breathing pauses can last from a few seconds to a few minutes. Sometimes a person starts breathing again with a loud snort or choking sound. This results in a poor quality of sleep and a person does not feel rested when they awaken.



During sleep apnea, the throat temporarily blocks.

### What causes sleep apnea?

Obstructive sleep apnea, the most common form of sleep apnea, is caused by a narrowing of the airway usually because the soft tissue in the back of the throat collapses during sleep. When this happens, the amount of oxygen in your blood may drop.

### What are the complications of sleep apnea?

Untreated sleep apnea can cause

- Fatigue, memory problems and headaches
- Depression and irritability
- Increase of risk of high blood pressure, heart disease or stroke
- Work related or driving accidents
- Contribute to diabetes
- Impotency

### Who is at risk for sleep apnea?

- Being overweight
- Being over age 40
- Having a neck size greater than 17 inches
- Having a narrow airway or having enlarged tonsils
- Being male (although women are also at risk if overweight)
- Using alcohol, sedatives, or tranquilizers as this relaxes the muscles in the throat
- Smoking as it increases the amount of inflammation in the upper airway
- Having a family history of sleep apnea



### How is sleep apnea diagnosed?

Your health care provider may recommend you go for a sleep evaluation. Tests to detect sleep apnea may include Nocturnal Polysomnography. During this test you are hooked up to equipment that monitors your heart, lung and brain activity, breathing patterns, arm and leg movements and blood oxygen while you are sleeping.

### How is sleep apnea treated?

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) is the most effective nonsurgical treatment. CPAP uses a machine with a mask that covers your mouth and nose. A CPAP machine increases the air pressure in your throat so that the airway does not close when you breathe so you get more oxygen when you sleep. It may take a while for a person to get used to using the CPAP machine. Most people have much more energy and feel rested when using the CPAP because they get a good night's sleep.

