

## Is there a Snore War in your House?

We all know that a good night's sleep is good for us, but there is a lot of debate over what constitutes a good night's sleep. For some people, that may mean eight hours; others can get by on less; and some may need much more. But no matter how many hours we need, one fact is undeniable: quality of sleep is very important to good health and alertness in our day-to-day life.

There are many reasons that people don't sleep well, whether due to environmental factors or physical ones. But because lack of quality sleep can cause numerous issues with health and quality of life, it is important to identify and address the root causes. While many people consider these problems unavoidable, the fact is that many sleep disorders are highly treatable.

One of the most common yet unrecognized sleep disorders is sleep apnea. Sleep apnea causes people to stop breathing while they sleep—sometimes as many as hundreds of times per night, and those pauses in breathing can last as long as a minute. A person suffering from this condition may or may not awaken during these lapses in breathing, so they may not even be aware of the problem. They may even feel rested in the morning, yet the constant interruptions in sleep can cause difficulty with concentration and memory; weight gain; headaches; and other physical and emotional problems.

According to the National Institutes of Health, sleep apnea is as common as adult diabetes, and affects more than twelve million Americans. Risk factors include being male, overweight, and over the age of forty, but sleep apnea can strike anyone at any age, and in some cases even affects children.

The most common symptoms of sleep apnea include very loud, **heavy snoring** often interrupted by silence then gasps; and falling asleep during the day (at work, watching TV, driving, etc). Other symptoms include morning headaches, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, anxiety or depression, irritability or short temper, mood or behavior changes, decreased interest in sex, and loss of energy.

The good news is that sleep apnea is treatable. The LRGHealthcare Sleep Center (an accredited sleep center) specializes in diagnosing and treating sleep apnea. If you suspect you have sleep apnea, call your primary care provider. He or she may refer you to the Sleep Center for a sleep study, which involves an overnight stay in the center for observation by a sleep technologist.

If the professionals in the Sleep Center determine that you do have sleep apnea, there are many treatment strategies that may help. General tips include weight loss if you are overweight; avoiding alcohol within three hours of bedtime; and avoiding sleeping on your back. Specific treatment options include the use of dental appliances that help keep the airway open by bringing the jaw forward during sleep; surgery by an Ear, Nose, and Throat specialist; or the use of a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machine. This equipment is the most prescribed treatment for sleep apnea, and involves the use of a mask to deliver a small amount of pressure to prevent structures in the throat from blocking air movement in and out of the lungs during sleep. Patients often experience immediate relief from CPAP therapy.

If you think that you may have sleep apnea, please call your primary care provider. For more information regarding the LRGHealthcare Sleep Center, please call 524-3211, ext. 3020.

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