



Sleep Apnoea

In order to have good health, three things need to happen: good nutrition, physical activity and good sleep.

Disordered sleep, whatever the cause, can have serious consequences on general health.

Sleep apnoea is a sleep disorder characterised by pauses in breathing during sleep, leading to extremely fragmented and often poor quality sleep. Obstructive Sleep Apnoea, caused by a physical blockage to airflow, is the most common form. It occurs when the soft tissue at the back of the throat relaxes during sleep and blocks the airway, often causing loud snoring. It affects about one in every 20 men and about one in every 50 women. Although sleep apnoea has been recognised for the last 100 years, its serious health effects have only become clear in the last 30 years.

Recent research has shown an association between type 2 diabetes and sleep apnoea. Both these conditions are strongly linked to cardiovascular disease. Excess weight, associated with a higher risk of hypertension, high cholesterol and insulin resistance, is one of the strongest factors of developing sleep apnoea. Certain physical attributes can also be risk factors such as having a thick neck, deviated septum, receding chin or enlarged tonsils or adenoids (mainly in children).

But not everyone who snores has sleep apnoea, and not everyone who has sleep apnoea snores. Even if you

don't have sleep apnoea, a snoring problem can get in the way of your bed partner's rest and any potential romantic activity.

Sleep apnoea often goes undiagnosed for obvious reasons. It is first noticed by others who witness sleep patterns, or is suspected because of a history of habitual snoring and/or its daytime effects such as dry mouth and sore throat on waking, fatigue, sleepiness, morning headaches, irritability, poor memory, depression, mood changes, sexual dysfunction and increased night time urination.

Diagnosis is made with an overnight sleep study and treatment is based on the findings of this.

Weight loss is the primary treatment for mild to moderate sleep apnoea in people who are

overweight or obese. This may improve energy, alertness, social interaction and work performance, reduce accidents and sexual dysfunction.

Quitting smoking, avoiding alcohol, sleeping pills and sedatives, avoiding caffeine and heavy meals within 2 hours of going to bed, and maintaining regular sleep hours are among lifestyle changes that may help. Also sleeping on your side and propping the head of the bed up by about 15cms.

Discuss medical treatment options such as CPAP (with or without a mask) BPAP, dental devices and surgery with your GP.

Sleep apnoea can lead to serious health problems over time, including diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and weight gain. With lifestyle changes and treatment, you can control the symptoms, get your sleep sorted and start every day refreshed and alert.

