

Trouble Staying Fully Charged? Learn About Obstructive Sleep Apnea

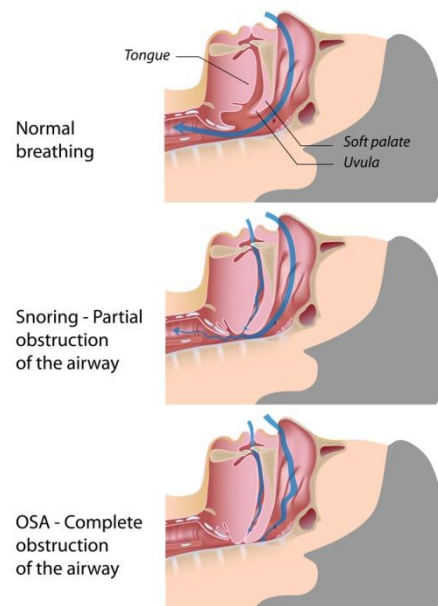
Has someone told you that you snore loudly at night, keeping other people awake? Maybe someone has told you that they have seen you grunting and gasping for breath during sleep? Have you felt tired during the day no matter how much sleep you think you got the previous night? If you can answer yes to these questions then you may be experiencing the symptoms of Obstructive Sleep Apnea, or OSA for short.



What is OSA?

OSA is a sleep disorder that results in your breathing being repeatedly interrupted during sleep. OSA occurs when the muscles in the back of your throat relax when you fall asleep, and as a result your airway becomes obstructed. When your airway is partially obstructed you snore loudly. When your airway is completely obstructed you experience a pause in breathing called an “apnea”, which can last 10 seconds or much longer. During an apnea you are not getting any oxygen into your lungs!

If you are experiencing an apnea you will eventually awaken from sleep just enough to regain muscle control, gasp and take a series of breaths before falling back to sleep. Once asleep, your throat muscles will relax and you will experience another apnea and oxygen will again be cut off. So you will come back up out of sleep to gasp for air, and this process repeats itself over and over again throughout the night. Each apnea restricts the amount of oxygen you get and each arousal, or short awakening out of sleep, reduces your sleep quality and quantity. Hundreds of apneas and arousals can occur throughout the night. Interestingly, people with OSA don't come fully out of sleep during arousals and therefore have no recollection of their repeated nighttime awakenings.



Do I Have OSA?

If you have OSA you may experience one or more of the symptoms on this checklist:

- I snore during sleep
- I gasp for air during sleep
- I have excessive sleepiness during the day time
- I have recurring headaches
- I have low energy levels
- I have weight gain

Consequences to Health, Wellbeing and Safety

When you have OSA, the many nighttime arousals that you experience constantly disrupt your sleep. This results in fatigue, which has been shown to reduce our alertness and mental performance. Long term health consequences of OSA are related to oxygen deprivation during the night, and also a long-term accumulated sleep debt. OSA is a serious condition that can lead to high blood pressure, mood and memory problems, higher risk of stroke and heart disease, and mental disorders.

If you suffer from OSA, it can have a negative impact on your ability to be fully charged. You may experience very low energy levels during the day or have difficulty staying alert, especially at times when demands for your mental attention wane. Experiencing excessive daytime sleepiness is one of the most common signs of OSA. This can become a safety issue when driving, or using dangerous equipment or working in hazardous environments.

Diagnosis and Treatment Options

The first step to determining if you may suffer from OSA is to conduct an initial screening. Tools to self-screen are available at the website for the American Sleep Apnea Association:

<http://www.sleepapnea.org/treat/test-yourself.html>

If you screen positive for OSA, you should discuss your screening results with your primary care physician or a sleep specialist in order to get a formal diagnosis and develop a treatment regimen that is right for you. The primary methods for evaluating you for OSA include a thorough review of your current medical history and an overnight sleep study. Sleep studies may be conducted during a visit to a sleep lab, or at home using specialized equipment. During the study your activity during sleep will be monitored and tracked. PSG Polysomnography (PSG) measurement of brain waves, blood oxygen levels, respiration, and eye and chin movement will be collected for diagnosis. None of the monitoring is painful and no needles are involved. A specialist will review the results of your study and determine if you have OSA.

Treatment options include continuous positive airway pressure, or CPAP, which provides a gentle amount of air pressure through a mask worn during sleep. This pressure keeps your airway open and eliminates the apneas and arousals. Other treatments include the use of a dental device worn during the night to move your lower jaw slightly forward and this helps to keep your airway open.

Seeking Treatment and Additional Information

If you think you may be suffering from OSA and it is affecting your ability to have energy and be fully charged during your daytime activities, contact your primary care physician and explain your situation. Be prepared to share thoughts about your sleep patterns, how you feel during the day, and any current medical or other issues you may be experiencing. If you have completed a self-screening you can also share those results. OSA can have detrimental impacts to your long term health but treatment options are very effective and can eliminate these issues and improve how your ability to live life fully charged.

For more detailed additional information on OSA, refer to the following web resources:

American Sleep Apnea Association – Test Yourself:

<http://www.sleepapnea.org/treat/test-yourself.html>

National Sleep Foundation – Information on Obstructive Sleep Apnea:

<http://sleepfoundation.org/sleep-disorders-problems/sleep-apnea>

Harvard Sleep Education Program – An Overview of Sleep Disorders:

<http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/getting/treatment/an-overview-of-sleep-disorders>
