



## How Is Sleep Apnea Treated?

Lifestyle changes, mouthpieces, breathing devices, and surgery are used to treat sleep apnea. Medicines typically aren't used to treat the condition.

The goals of treating sleep apnea are to: Restore regular breathing during sleep and relieve symptoms such as loud snoring and daytime sleepiness. Treatment may improve other medical problems linked to sleep apnea, such as high blood pressure. Treatment also can reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. If you have sleep apnea, talk with your doctor or sleep specialist about the treatment options that will work best for you.

Lifestyle changes and/or mouthpieces may be enough to relieve mild sleep apnea. People who have moderate or severe sleep apnea may need breathing devices or surgery.

If you continue to have daytime sleepiness despite treatment, your doctor may ask whether you're getting enough sleep. (Adults should get at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep; children and adolescents need more.)

If treatment and enough sleep don't relieve your daytime sleepiness, your doctor will consider other treatment options.

## Lifestyle Changes

If you have mild sleep apnea, some changes in daily activities or habits may be all the treatment you need.

- Avoid alcohol and medicines that make you sleepy. They make it harder for your throat to stay open while you sleep.
- Lose weight if you're overweight or obese. Even a little weight loss can improve your symptoms.
- Sleep on your side instead of your back to help keep your throat open. You can sleep with special pillows or shirts that prevent you from sleeping on your back.
- Keep your nasal passages open at night with nasal sprays or allergy medicines, if needed. Talk with your doctor about whether these treatments might help you.
- If you smoke, quit. Talk with your doctor about programs and products that can help you quit smoking.

## Mouthpieces

A mouthpiece, sometimes called an oral appliance, may help some people who have mild sleep apnea. Your doctor also may recommend a mouthpiece if you snore loudly but don't have sleep apnea.

A dentist or orthodontist can make a custom-fit plastic mouthpiece for treating sleep apnea. (An orthodontist specializes in correcting teeth or jaw problems.) The mouthpiece will adjust your lower jaw and your tongue to help keep your airways open while you sleep.

If you use a mouthpiece, tell your doctor if you have discomfort or pain while using the device. You may need periodic office visits so your doctor can adjust your mouthpiece to fit better.

## Breathing Devices

CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) is the most common treatment for moderate to severe sleep apnea in adults. A CPAP machine uses a mask that fits over your mouth and nose, or just over your nose. The machine gently blows air into your throat.

The air presses on the wall of your airway. The air pressure is adjusted so that it's just enough to stop the airways from becoming narrowed or blocked during sleep.

Treating sleep apnea may help you stop snoring. But not snoring doesn't mean that you no longer have sleep apnea or can stop using CPAP. Sleep apnea will return if CPAP is stopped or not used correctly.

Usually, a technician will come to your home to bring the CPAP equipment. The technician will set up the CPAP machine and adjust it based on your doctor's prescription. After the initial setup, you may need to have the CPAP adjusted on occasion for the best results.

CPAP treatment may cause side effects in some people. These side effects include a dry or stuffy nose, irritated skin on your face, dry mouth, and headaches. If your CPAP isn't adjusted properly, you may get stomach bloating and discomfort while wearing the mask.

If you're having trouble with CPAP side effects, work with your sleep specialist, his or her nursing staff, and the CPAP technician. Together, you can take steps to reduce these side effects. These steps include adjusting the CPAP settings or the size/fit of the mask, or adding moisture to the air as it flows through the mask. A nasal spray may relieve a dry, stuffy, or runny nose.

There are many types of CPAP machines and masks. Tell your doctor if you're not happy with the type you're using. He or she may suggest switching to a different type

that may work better for you.

People who have severe sleep apnea symptoms generally feel much better once they begin treatment with CPAP.

## Surgery

Some people who have sleep apnea may benefit from surgery. The type of surgery and how well it works depend on the cause of the sleep apnea.

Surgery is done to widen breathing passages. It usually involves shrinking, stiffening, or removing excess tissue in the mouth and throat or resetting the lower jaw.

Surgery to shrink or stiffen excess tissue in the mouth or throat is done in a doctor's office or a hospital. Shrinking tissue may involve small shots or other treatments to the tissue. A series of such treatments may be needed to shrink the excess tissue. To stiffen excess tissue, the doctor makes a small cut in the tissue and inserts a small piece of stiff plastic.

Surgery to remove excess tissue is done in a hospital. You're given medicine that makes you sleep during the surgery. After surgery, you may have throat pain that lasts for 1 to 2 weeks.

Surgery to remove the tonsils, if they're blocking the airway, may be very helpful for some children. Your child's doctor may suggest waiting some time to see whether these tissues shrink on their own. This is common as small children grow.

**-Source: DeVilbiss Healthcare**