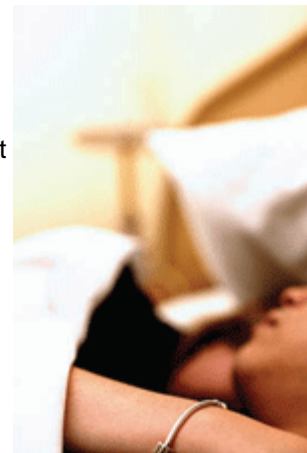


Health & Fitness Tips

Snoring – A Simple Annoyance or A Health Hazard

When was the last time your partner tapped you gently on the shoulder and asked you to roll over because your snoring was keeping them awake? For repeat offenders, maybe the polite request has been replaced by an elbow in the ribs, or you are finding it hard to keep a long term housemate because of the incessant noise emitting from your bedroom and keeping them awake at night? For many the problem is simple snoring, but for some it is the sign of a more serious health risk.



What is Snoring?

Snoring is the noise caused by vibration of the soft structures in the back of the throat as a person takes a breath in. During sleep, the muscles of the soft palate and back of the throat relax, causing the airway to narrow. As air moves over these relaxed structures they tend to vibrate, causing the characteristic noise. The incidence of snoring increases with a cold, sinusitis or other form of nasal congestion.

Men are more likely to snore than women, a recent study indicating that 34% of men are habitual snorers, with up to 50% reporting snoring at some time. The habitual snorer is usually:

- Male
- Aged 30-65 years
- Overweight
- Suffering from high blood pressure
- A drinker

Obstructive Sleep Apnoea

In a percentage of cases, snoring is caused by obstructive sleep apnoea. Habitual snoring is a strong indicator for sleep apnoea, a serious medical condition that becomes more prevalent as a person ages and gains weight. The muscles in the throat collapse during sleep, and with the excess weight around the tongue and neck, the airway becomes obstructed and breathing stops. These pauses in breathing can last for ten seconds or more. The person will then wake themselves up in an effort to restart breathing.

Obstructive sleep apnoea affects twice as many men as women, and doctors believe that about nine percent of men over forty suffer from the condition. Most sufferers are blissfully unaware that they are affected, and it is often their partner that can alert them to the problem. Although the person with obstructive sleep apnoea does not realize it, they are waking up frequently during the night and not getting quality sleep. As a result, they are in a constant state of fatigue, and suffer from excessive daytime sleepiness. This leads to a higher risk of motor vehicle and workplace accidents.

What should you do?

Snoring is a significant problem for many people, but often goes undiagnosed as people are not aware of the health implications if not treated, particularly in the case of sleep apnoea. Anyone who thinks they may have sleep apnoea, or whose partner thinks they have symptoms, should see a doctor to have the problem diagnosed. The doctor can refer them to a sleep disorder clinic for further testing if they feel it is necessary.

How to Manage Snoring or Sleep Apnoea

Some simple remedies can sometimes eliminate or reduce the severity of snoring. These include:

- Lose weight
- Cut back on alcohol intake in the hours before bedtime
- Avoid sleeping tablets
- Sleep on your side instead of your back
- Treat nasal congestion
- Get fitted with an oral appliance eg mouthguard
- Try using a flat pillow

In the case of obstructive sleep apnoea, treatment may also include wearing a customized mouth guard or a mask over the nose at night.