

The Basics of Snoring

Snoring is a common condition that can affect anyone, although it occurs more frequently in men and people who are overweight. Snoring has a tendency to worsen with age.

Occasional snoring is usually not very serious and is mostly a nuisance for your bed partner. However, if you are a habitual snorer, you not only disrupt the sleep patterns of those close to you, but you also impair your own sleep quality. Medical assistance is often needed for habitual snorers (and their loved ones) to get a good night's sleep.

What Causes Snoring?

Snoring occurs when the flow of air through the mouth and nose is physically obstructed. Air flow can be obstructed by a combination of factors, including:

- **Obstructed nasal airways:** Some people snore only during allergy seasons or when they have a sinus infection. Deformities of the nose such as a deviated septum (a structural change in the wall that separates one nostril from the other) or nasal polyps can also cause obstruction.
- **Poor muscle tone in the throat and tongue:** Throat and tongue muscles can be too relaxed, which allows them to collapse and fall back into the airway. This can result from deep sleep, alcohol consumption, and use of some sleeping pills. Normal aging causes further relaxation of these muscles.
- **Bulky throat tissue:** Being overweight can cause bulky throat tissue. Also, children with large tonsils and adenoids often snore.
- **Long soft palate and/or uvula:** A long soft palate or a long uvula (the dangling tissue in back of the mouth) can narrow the opening from the nose to the throat. When these structures vibrate and bump against one another the airway becomes obstructed, causing snoring.

Health Risks Associated With Snoring

Habitual snorers can be at risk for serious health problems, including obstructive sleep apnea. Sleep apnea creates several problems, including:

- **Long interruptions of breathing** (more than 10 seconds) during sleep caused by partial or total obstruction or blockage of the airway.
- **Frequent waking from sleep**, even though you may not realize it.
- **Light sleeping.** People with obstructive sleep apnea sleep lightly to try to keep their throat muscles tense enough to maintain airflow.
- **Strain on the heart.** Prolonged suffering from obstructive sleep apnea often results in higher blood pressure and may cause enlargement of the heart, with higher risks of heart attack and stroke.
- **Poor night's sleep.** This leads to drowsiness during the day and can interfere with your quality of life.
- **Low oxygen levels in the blood.** This can lead to constricted blood vessels in the lungs and eventually pulmonary hypertension.
- **Chronic headaches.**
- **Obesity.**
- **Daytime sleepiness and fatigue**

SOURCES:

American Academy of Otolaryngology.

National Sleep Foundation.

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http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/snoring-basics?ecd=wnl_slw_110614_image&ctr=wnl-slw-110614-image_nsl-promo_1&mb=tdqBiFFJL7DPXNZ2FHEaeHnVev1imbCy0%2f9rpkC37M%3d