



# Sleep apnoea



**Sleep apnoea is a common sleep disorder in which you have one or more pauses in breathing during sleep.**


**Lots of people with heart failure struggle to breathe while asleep, this problem can be related to sleep apnoea and can seriously affect your heart health.**

There are two types of sleep apnoea. These are obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) and central sleep apnoea (CSA). In OSA, the walls of the throat relax and become more narrow during sleep, which makes it harder to breathe. People with OSA may wake up in the middle of the night with a sensation that they are choking, or snorting, as their body struggles to breathe. In CSA, the brain temporarily fails to send the correct signals to the muscles involved in breathing.

Of these types of sleep apnoea, OSA is more common, but some patients have both types of sleep apnoea at once.

Regardless of type, sleep apnoea can seriously affect your health. Untreated sleep apnoea causes sudden changes in oxygen flow, which puts an additional strain on the heart. Sleep apnoea can set off activity elsewhere in the body, such as the nervous system, which may also damage heart health<sup>2</sup>. People with sleep apnoea have poor quality sleep, and so they often have symptoms that affect their quality of life, such as feeling sleepy during the day, poor concentration and memory problems.

The good news is that there are effective treatments for sleep apnoea, that can relieve symptoms and limit or prevent the impact of sleep apnoea on the heart<sup>1</sup>. Please read on to find out more.



The good news is that there are effective treatments for sleep apnoea, that can relieve symptoms and limit or prevent the impact of sleep apnoea on the heart<sup>1</sup>.





## Symptoms of sleep apnoea

If you have sleep apnoea, you may not notice the symptoms that occur when you sleep. Very often, people only suspect they have sleep apnoea when friends or family members notice the symptoms as the patient sleeps. Those symptoms include:

- Loud snoring
- Noisy, difficult breathing
- Brief periods without breathing, often followed by gasping or snorting (sometimes these can wake the patient up)
- Night sweats
- Waking up often to go to the lavatory



People who have sleep apnoea may notice other symptoms while they are awake, such as:



- Not feeling refreshed when they wake up after sleep
- Daytime tiredness
- Poor memory and/or concentration
- Headaches, especially in the morning



## Treatments

If you suspect that you have sleep apnoea, it is very important that you talk to your doctor — as we have seen, sleep apnoea can damage your heart health and it is important to avoid that. So please seek help as quickly as possible.



Your doctor is likely to ask you about your symptoms, and may ask you to use some monitoring equipment that will assess your sleep quality. If you are diagnosed with sleep apnoea, your doctor will decide on a treatment that makes your breathing normal again, when you sleep. He or she may give you some medicine, and/or some other treatment.



Other treatment options include continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). Patients who use CPAP wear a mask, attached to a mechanical device, that delivers compressed air while they sleep. The compressed air keeps the airways open, so that the patient can breathe more easily.

Another technique, adaptive pressure support servoventilation, may also be used, but is less common.

## Helping yourself

Your doctor may also suggest some self-help, to manage your own symptoms.

There are other things that you can do, to reduce your chances of developing sleep apnoea, and/or to manage your symptoms if you have it. For example:

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese can cause and/or worsen sleep apnoea.
- **Avoid alcohol.**
- **Don't smoke.**
- **Sleep on your side rather than on your back.** Sleeping on your back can worsen symptoms in both types of sleep apnoea.
- **Prop your head up.** Elevate the head of your bed or elevate your body from the waist up by using pillows.
- **Keep your nasal passages open.** If this is a problem, for example if you are conscious of having a stuffy or blocked nose, speak to your doctor because (s)he may be able to prescribe appropriate medicine. Similarly, if you suffer from allergies do speak to your doctor, because allergies can cause nasal congestion — and allergy management and medicines can help.



**Sleep apnoea can damage your heart health and your quality of life, but it can be treated. If you — or somebody close to you — notices the symptoms of sleep apnoea, make sure you discuss this with your healthcare team.**

If you happen to have an urgent medical concern, please call your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call your local Emergency Contact number. Remember, your doctor is your primary source for information on your condition and treatment. Be sure to speak with them if you have any questions or concerns.

### References

1. Zhai AB, Yip A, Haddad H. Heart failure and sleep-disordered breathing. *Curr Opin Cardiol* 2016 Mar; 31 (2): 224-8.
2. Naughton MT, Bradley TD. Sleep apnea in congestive heart failure. *Clin Chest Med* 1998 Mar; 19 (1): 99-113.