

You can help to protect yourself from future snoring and reduce the number of current episodes, by making lifestyle modifications.

Snoring

What Is Snoring?

Snoring, also called stertor by the medical community, is a disturbance of breathing during sleep. In normal sleep, air flows in smoothly and quietly through the top of the airway (nose and throat). Nothing interferes with the passage of the air. However, a sleeper who snores draws breath through airways that are partially blocked by tissues. As they strike each other and vibrate, they make sounds that we hear as snoring.

Occasional snoring occurs in the lives of almost half the U. S. adult population; chronic snoring affects an additional 25 percent. More than one-quarter of American adults who are overweight or obese develop chronic snoring.

Snoring presents a significant public-health problem, affecting a very large group of Americans and contributing to other health problems. In addition, chronic snoring can indicate another, more serious condition called sleep apnea. Apnea, which means “absence of breath”, is characterized by long pauses between breaths in sleep. These pauses significantly reduce the supply of oxygen that reaches the brain. If you snore, it is important that you see your doctor to ensure that you do not also have sleep apnea, especially because studies shows that it affects about 10 percent of people who snore.

What Causes Snoring?

The direct cause of snoring is one of two problems. The first is an unusual mass of tissue, such a large tongue or large tonsils, in the airways. The second is abnormally

low muscle tone around the airway during sleep. These problems in turn result from conditions within your overall health and family history; they are described in the next section, “Who Is at Risk of Chronic Snoring?”

Who Is at Risk of Chronic Snoring?

Chronic snoring occurs in all age groups and both sexes. However, you are at increased risk if you have any of the following features of head-and-neck anatomy:

- ❖ Small upper airway
- ❖ Large tongue, tonsils or uvula (the flap of skin at the back of the throat)
- ❖ Recessed chin, small jaw, or large overbite
- ❖ A neck circumference of 16 inches in a woman or 17 in a man
- ❖ Abnormalities such as a deviated septum (a malformation of the wall that separates one nostril from the other)

The following habits or experiences can also heighten your risk of snoring:

- ❖ Smoking
- ❖ Taking sedative medications
- ❖ Being overweight
- ❖ Consuming significant levels of alcohol
- ❖ Age (people who are 40 years of age or older are at higher risk)
- ❖ Having a family history of chronic snoring

What Are the Signs and Symptoms?

Snoring is itself a symptom of unusual head-and-neck anatomy or a deficiency in muscle tone.

How Is Snoring Diagnosed?

If you consult your doctor about snoring, he or she usually first ensures that you do not have sleep apnea. Your doctor may refer you to an otolaryngologist, a specialist in disorders of the head and neck. He or she examines your neck, palate, throat, mouth,

and nose to determine whether the snoring results from abnormalities that can obstruct breathing. In diagnosing a child, a doctor or specialist may pay special attention to tonsils and adenoids.

If obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is suspected, a specialist may make a sleep study to make a firm diagnosis. Your doctor or specialist may test for OSA if you have any of these conditions:

- ❖ High blood pressure
- ❖ Heart disease
- ❖ Prior stroke
- ❖ Daytime sleepiness or fatigue

What Are Common Treatments?

Available treatments for snoring include devices or appliances, self-management (behavioral steps), and airway surgery.

Devices and Appliances

If you have been diagnosed with chronic snoring, your doctor may prescribe a continuous positive airway pressure device (CPAP). The CPAP is a mask that fits over the nose and mouth and gently blows air into the airway to help keep it open during sleep. Your doctor may alternatively prescribe the use of certain dental devices that reposition the lower jaw and tongue.

Self-management

Lifestyle changes are effective ways of mitigating symptoms of chronic snoring. The following behavioral steps reduce the severity of chronic snoring:

- ❖ Experiment with sleeping on your side instead of on your back
- ❖ If you are overweight, lose weight
- ❖ Avoid alcohol
- ❖ Quit smoking

Surgery

Chronic snoring also can be cured by airway surgery to remove obstructive tissue. Examples include these procedures:

- ❖ Laser-Assisted Uvuloplasty (LAUP): removes the uvula and surrounding tissue to open the airway behind the palate. This procedure is widely used to relieve snoring and can be performed on an outpatient basis.
- ❖ Radio Frequency (RF) of the soft palate: uses radio waves to shrink the tissue in the throat or tongue, increasing the space in the throat and making airway obstruction less likely. The inner tissue shrinks while the outer tissue remains unharmed. This procedure, however, is experimental and its success rate is unknown.

Can Snoring Be Prevented?

You can help to protect yourself from future snoring and reduce the number of current episodes, by taking the following precautions:

- ❖ Lose weight: as little as 10 pounds may be enough to make a difference
- ❖ Sleep on your side rather than on your back
- ❖ Avoid alcohol, caffeine and heavy meals, especially within two hours of bedtime
- ❖ Avoid sedatives: sedatives can relax your throat muscles and increase the tendency for airway obstruction related to snoring. If you take a maintenance medication that is also a sedative, talk with your doctor about adjusting it.

Should I Call My Doctor?

Call your doctor promptly if you have any of the following symptoms (or reports of them from family or sleeping partners):

- ❖ Excessive sleepiness during the day
- ❖ Lack of concentration
- ❖ Impaired cognitive function
- ❖ Excessive or loud snoring
- ❖ Pauses of more than 10 seconds during sleep, at approximate rates of 15 per hour

For More Information

For more information, refer to the following medical resources:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/snoring.html>

http://www.aaoms.org/sleep_apnea.php

The content in this document is neither intended nor recommended as a substitute for seeking professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. It is recommended that you seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare professional regarding any medical questions related to the topics contained within this document, your health or conditions.