

# PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

### Causes, Symptoms, and Management of Sleep Apnea

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Sleep apnea is a common sleep disorder characterized by pauses in breathing during sleep. These pauses can last from seconds to minutes and can occur multiple times throughout the night. Sleep apnea can affect individuals regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity, though it occurs more frequently in men than women.

#### CAUSES OF SLEEP APNEA

**Obstructive sleep apnea** is the most common type of sleep apnea and occurs when the upper airways become blocked while sleeping, which partially or completely stops airflow. This is commonly caused by obesity, large tonsils, nasal congestion, or drinking alcohol before falling asleep.

**Central sleep apnea** is less common and occurs when the brain does not send the correct signals required to breathe. Common causes include heart failure, neuromuscular disorders, and chronic opioid use.

#### SYMPTOMS OF SLEEP APNEA

- Loud snoring
- Gasping, choking, or pauses in breathing during sleep witnessed by a partner
- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Morning headaches
- Irritability or mood changes
- Difficulty concentrating
- Dry mouth or sore throat upon waking

#### MANAGEMENT OF SLEEP APNEA

It is important to diagnose and treat sleep apnea to prevent serious complications, including high blood pressure and stroke. A sleep study, or polysomnography, monitors breathing and brain activity while sleeping to diagnose sleep apnea.

The preferred treatment for obstructive sleep apnea is positive airway pressure (PAP) therapy. This involves wearing a mask connected to a machine that delivers airflow to keep the airway open during sleep.

#### SOURCES

Epstein LJ, Kristo D, Strollo PJ Jr, et al. Clinical guideline for the evaluation, management and long-term care of obstructive sleep apnea in adults. *J Clin Sleep Med*. 2009;5(3):263-276.

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Qaseem A, Holty JEC, Owens DK, et al. Management of obstructive sleep apnea in adults: a clinical practice guideline from the American College of Physicians. *Ann Intern Med*. 2013;159(7):471-483. doi: 10.7326/0003-4819-159-7-201310010-00704

Other options include oral appliances, which are not as effective, hypoglossal nerve stimulation, and surgery in serious cases. Lifestyle changes can also be implemented to reduce risk of developing and improve symptoms of sleep apnea, including:

- Weight loss
- Alcohol avoidance
- Tobacco avoidance
- Side sleeping
- Elevating the head of the bed
- Nasal decongestant use

Figure 1

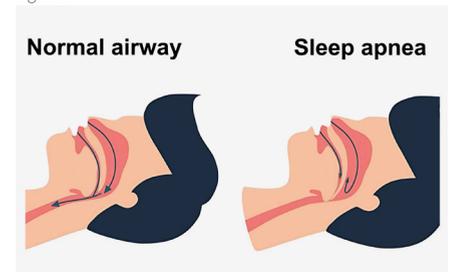


Figure 2

