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5 Tips For Better Sleep

- 1. Try sticking to a schedule.** Maintaining a regular sleep schedule helps reinforce your body's sleep-wake cycle and can help you fall asleep more easily at night.
- 2. Don't eat or drink before bedtime.** If you're prone to heartburn, avoid spicy foods which can make your heartburn flare during the night. Also, limit how much you drink before bed. Too much liquid can cause frequent trips to the restroom.
- 3. Avoid caffeine and alcohol in the evening.** These are stimulants that can keep you awake. Avoid caffeine for eight hours before your planned bedtime. Your body doesn't store caffeine, but it takes many hours to eliminate the stimulant and its effects. And although often believed to be a sedative, alcohol actually disrupts sleep.
- 4. Make your bedroom cool, dark, quiet and comfortable.** Create a room that's ideal for sleeping. Adjust the lighting, temperature, humidity and noise level to your preferences. Use blackout curtains, eye covers, earplugs, extra blankets, or a fan to create an environment that suits your needs.
- 5. Go to bed when you're tired.** If you don't fall asleep within 15 to 20 minutes, get up. Go back to bed when you're tired. Don't agonize over falling asleep. The stress will only prevent sleep.



The Two Types of Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is a sleep disorder that claims more than twelve million Americans as victims. Because of the lack of awareness, the majority of these victims remain undiagnosed and untreated. The good part is that sleep apnea can be treated, so get informed and see if you are a victim of sleep apnea.

Sleep apnea is a sleep disorder in which breathing repeatedly starts and stops during sleep. There are two main types of sleep apnea, obstructive, and central. **Obstructive Sleep Apnea** is the most common of the two. Obstructive sleep apnea occurs when the muscles in the back of the throat relax. When the muscles relax, the airway closes as you breathe in, and momentarily stops. The oxygen in your blood begins to lower which causes signals to be sent to the brain. Your brain senses the inability to breathe and briefly rouses you from sleep in order to reopen your airway. This awakening is usually so brief that you don't remember it. This pattern can repeat itself up to 30 times an hour, preventing a good restful night's sleep and causing you to feel tired during your waking hours. **Signs** of obstructive sleep apnea include loud snoring, feeling tired after a full night's sleep, waking with a dry mouth or sore throat, and morning headaches. The second type of sleep apnea is **Central Sleep Apnea**. Central sleep apnea is much less common than obstructive sleep apnea. This type of sleep disorder differs from obstructive sleep apnea because airway passages do not get blocked. Instead, central sleep apnea is caused when the brain fails to transmit signals

to the breathing muscles. Waking up gasping for air, loud snoring, and daytime sleepiness are all **symptoms** of central sleep apnea. Unlike victims of obstructive sleep apnea, the people who experience central sleep apnea tend to remember their sleep awakenings. The most common **cause** of central sleep apnea is heart disease. If an individual has a mild case of central sleep apnea, doctors might recommend life changes in order to get rid of the problem. Such recommendations might be to lose weight, exercise more, or quit smoking. Sleeping on your side, avoiding alcohol, and using a saline nasal spray to keep the airway passage open are some other minor lifestyle changes that may be recommended. Most victims of sleep apnea are not aware of their condition until it is too late. Untreated, sleep apnea can cause high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases, memory problems, weight gain, and headaches. In worst cases, untreated sleep apnea can cause job impairment and motor vehicle crashes. Fortunately, sleep apnea can be diagnosed and treated. As you can see, sleep apnea, both obstructive and central, can be extremely life threatening disorders. If you believe that you are suffering from sleep apnea, never hesitate to see a doctor.

National Sleep Awareness Week is March 7-13

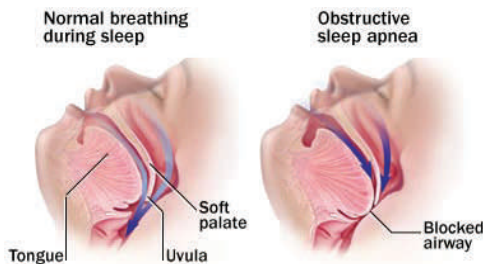
What Increases Your Risk of Sleep Apnea?

Any person can suffer from sleep apnea, but there are certain factors that increase the risk of sleep apnea.

- Having an excess amount of weight is one of the major contributors to sleep apnea. When an individual is overweight, fat deposits can build up around the airway preventing oxygen to enter the body. This does not mean that only individuals who are overweight develop sleep apnea. People who are thin can also develop this disorder.
- High blood pressure. Individuals with high blood pressure (hypertension) have a higher risk of developing sleep apnea.
- Narrowed airway. Some people inherit naturally narrow throats, or develop enlarged tonsils. Rare conditions like these can block the air passage, especially during sleep.
- Men are twice as likely to develop sleep apnea, but women increase their risk if they are overweight or have begun menopause.
- Being older. People who are over the age of 65 are two to three times more likely to develop sleep apnea.
- Family History. People who have a family history of sleep apnea have a higher chance of developing it.

- Use of alcohol. Alcohol relaxes the muscles in the throat which can lead to muscles blocking the airway.
- Smokers are three times more likely to develop obstructive sleep apnea. Smoking increases the amount of inflammation and fluid retention in the upper airway. Any inflammation in the airway can lead to blockage.
- Prolonged sitting. Sitting for long periods of time during the day has been known to cause fluids in your legs to shift towards your airways when you rest at night.

These risk factors can lead to a life of discomfort and danger. Once sleep apnea is diagnosed, it is important to start treatment early. When sleep apnea is in a severe stage, lifestyle changes are not an option anymore. Doctors usually recommend stronger treatments such as CPAP. Continuous Positive Airway Pressure is a type of treatment that delivers air through a mask which is placed around the nose. It provides a higher quantity of air at night which allows the airway passages to remain open. Some people tend to find this treatment uncomfortable and are not able to adjust to sleeping with a mask. Other devices which are similar to CPAP, include adjustable airway pressure devices and oral appliances. The last form of treatment, which is usually left for the more severe cases, is surgery. The surgery process typically includes the removal of excess tissue from the nose and throat areas which may be blocking the airway passages. If you believe that you are at high risk for developing sleep apnea, see a doctor as soon as possible.



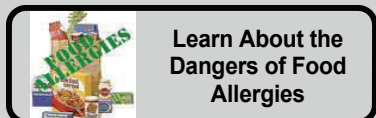
Coming Soon >>>

In The Next Issue

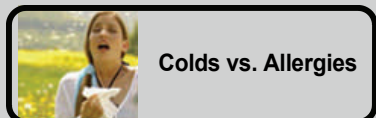
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As always, the City of McAllen Benefits Department is here to help you in your insurance inquiries as well. We can be reached at 956-681-1400 or by email at benefits@mcallen.net for your convenience.