

# Snoring

## What is snoring?

Snoring is noisy breathing during sleep.

## What is the cause?

Snoring may occur when air cannot flow smoothly through your air passages. Structures in your air passages may vibrate while you breathe. Some causes of snoring include:

- Sleeping on your back

Sleeping on your back lets your tongue fall back into your throat. Your tongue then blocks part of your throat. This makes a smaller passage for air, and tissues in your throat vibrate as you breathe, making noise.

- Having a blockage in your nose

A blockage can occur from allergies, a common cold, or a sinus infection. It can also happen after an injury that changes the shape of your nose or nasal passages.

Allergies can cause enlargement of your adenoids (tonsil-like tissue at the back of your nose, where the nose joins the upper throat). Enlarged adenoids can cause snoring by blocking your airway and vibrating while you breathe.

- Gaining weight

Gaining a large amount of weight can also cause or worsen snoring. The air passages become smaller by the accumulation of fat under the tissue lining the airway and by the increased pressure of a heavy chest on the airways.

- Using some types of medicine or alcohol

Using drugs that cause excessive relaxation or sleepiness can also cause snoring. These drugs include alcohol, sleeping pills, antihistamines, and pain medicine (especially narcotics). The drugs relax your muscles and cause the tongue to fall backward. Relaxed throat muscles may draw in from the sides and narrow the airway.

- Having sleep apnea

The problems that cause snoring can also cause a sometimes dangerous condition called sleep apnea. Having sleep apnea means that you have periods of no breathing, sometimes for as long as 30 seconds, when you are sleeping. This can happen many times during the night. It often interrupts your sleep and can prevent you from getting good-quality sleep. These periods of no breathing cause you to get less oxygen and can sometimes have fatal complications, such as heart rhythm problems. Symptoms of sleep apnea include snoring, being tired all the time, and often falling asleep during the day. A common side effect of sleep apnea is eating or snacking to stay awake. This leads to weight gain, which can make the snoring and sleep apnea worse.

If you have these symptoms, you need to see your healthcare provider promptly.

## **How is it treated?**

If there is an obvious cause of the snoring, then treating the cause often helps reduce the snoring. Possible solutions include:

- Losing weight
- Using medicine to unclog your nasal passages
- Sleeping on your side or stomach
- Having no alcohol before bedtime.

Sometimes raising the head of the bed or mattress can help prevent snoring. This should be done by making the top of the mattress or bed frame higher than the foot of the bed. Don't use more pillows. They can bend and block your airway and cause more breathing problems.

Simple nonprescription devices called nasal strips are available at pharmacies. A nasal strip is a piece of plastic that puts slight pressure on the bridge of the nose and is held in place by an adhesive tape. It helps keep your nasal passages open during sleep. Many people find nasal strips helpful, but they are relatively expensive because a new strip must be used each night. They might be a solution for special occasions.

If you have a problem with snoring and you feel tired when you wake up every morning, you may need to be checked for sleep apnea. If you have sleep apnea, it is important to get treatment because it can have serious effects on your health. The most common treatment is use of a machine that sends pressurized air into your nose and throat. The machine allows you to have normal oxygen levels through the night. This treatment is called continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP).

Ask your healthcare provider for additional help with your snoring or sleep problems.

## **How can I help take care of myself?**

See your healthcare provider for a careful history and physical to find out if you have any easily fixable causes of snoring and, most importantly, if you need to be tested for sleep apnea. Follow your provider's recommendations and check back to report the results of each suggested treatment. Only by knowing what works and what doesn't work can your provider help you lessen or eliminate the problem.

Sleep apnea can be hard to diagnose because the symptoms may be very subtle or you may think your snoring and fitful sleep is just normal for you. Sleep apnea, however, can be part of a vicious cycle with obesity. Obesity can cause sleep apnea, and sleep apnea often causes or worsens obesity because you may eat to stay awake during the day. Follow your provider's instructions for diagnosing sleep apnea and then for treating it if you have it.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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