

Date: 5/27/2008 Patient: Elizabeth Test

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Snoring

What is snoring?

Snoring is noisy breathing during sleep. It can happen when you are breathing in or breathing out.

How does it occur?

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

- Sleeping on your back

Sleeping on your back allows your tongue to fall backward into your throat. Your tongue then partially blocks your throat, making a smaller passage for air.

- 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 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. If you have these symptoms, you need to see your health care provider promptly.

How is snoring 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. Do not use more pillows, which can kink 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 do have sleep apnea, you may need additional medical treatment.

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

How long will the effects last?

How long the snoring problem lasts depends on the reason for the snoring. If the cause is temporary, such as seasonal allergies or drinking alcohol, there will be periods of time when you do not snore. If, however, it is due to the shape of your nose or throat, it may be a permanent problem unless it can be fixed surgically.

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