

Snoring and Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a condition that develops due to blockage of the ability to breathe during sleep. Snoring is the most prevalent sign of sleep apnea, but it is not present in everyone with OSA. Patients with mild obstruction may not receive a diagnosis of OSA, but snoring may be a severe problem in those patients. When the obstruction is more severe, the patient may be diagnosed with OSA. Treatment is needed for OSA for several reasons.

Symptoms of OSA include snoring, bedwetting (in children), morning headaches, high blood pressure, excessive sleepiness during the day. In general, the more severe the sleep apnea is, the worse the symptoms are. If you or your loved one tends to wake others up with their snoring, you should be evaluated.

Evaluation of OSA is done by a test called a polysomnography, otherwise known as a sleep study. Basically, the patient goes to a sleep lab to spend a few hours sleeping. Monitors are attached to monitor breathing, loudness of snoring, oxygen levels in the blood, heart rate, and many other parameters. The results of the test are studied to see how severe the problem is.

Treatment is needed for OSA for several reasons. Most immediately, it helps people feel better with less daytime sleepiness. This is especially important in those who operate heavy machinery, eg. truck drivers, crane operators, etc.. Furthermore, long term sleep apnea can result in heart problems, stroke, and uncontrolled hypertension. Treatment of OSA can help to prevent these problems.

Treatment for this disorder can involve surgery, but the surgery is very painful and long term results can be disappointing. It is generally recommended that adult patients should first be treated by nonsurgical means, eg. nasal CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure).

There are a number of devices that advance the lower jaw forward or do other manipulations of the airway to create room so that patients can breathe better. These may work for some patients, but in general, they aren't really considered to be an effective long term treatment. Weight loss is almost always recommended as it is often the primary factor causing OSA. Surgery is often considered in those patients whom nasal CPAP is ineffective or not tolerated.

Our physicians are up to date on the latest techniques to treat OSA and will be happy to discuss these surgical options with you.