

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



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Sleep Apnea

Sixty five million Americans (nearly half of all adults) suffer from sleep problems. There are over 100 different types of sleep disorders. One of the most common types of sleep disorders is sleep apnea.

What is Sleep Apnea?

Sleep apnea is a serious sleep disorder that occurs when a person's breathing is interrupted during sleep. People with untreated sleep apnea stop breathing repeatedly during their sleep, sometimes hundreds of times.

Two Types, Different Causes

The more common of the two forms of apnea is called **Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)**. It is caused by tissues in the nose and throat which are too large for the airway. These tissues may include simple nasal congestion, nasal polyps, a deviated septum, a large tongue, a narrow pharynx (or airway), an elongated uvula (the punching bag in the back of the throat) and/or inflamed tonsils and adenoids.

While awake, muscle tone keeps those tissues active, so they do not block the airway. When we sleep, we lose muscle tone, causing those



tissues to collapse into the airway. As you try to breathe against those tissues, they vibrate. These vibrations are snores.

If the tissues block the airway enough, your breathing can be significantly reduced or even stopped. These episodes may last a few seconds or a few minutes, and can occur over and over throughout the night. A certain amount of this activity can be considered normal; but if they occur more than 5-10 times an hour, it may be clinically significant.

Some people have over 100 of these events every hour that they sleep. Each episode may cause some people to wake up briefly, resume normal breathing, fall

back to sleep and start it all over again, all night long. Most people aren't even aware they're having breathing problems or waking up. Often, only in the clinical setting are researchers able to see these disruptions in breathing, and the accompanying disruptions in sleeping patterns.

Unlike OSA, the second type of apnea is called **Central Sleep Apnea (CSA)**. The airway is not blocked but the brain fails to signal the muscles to breathe due to instability in the respiratory control center. Bottom line, the central-respiratory center of the brain actually isn't sending a signal to breathe.

(Over)

Sleep Apnea (Continued)

What are the symptoms?

Common sleep apnea symptoms include:

- Waking up with a very sore and/or dry throat
- Occasionally waking up with a choking or gasping sensation
- Sleepiness during the day
- Morning headaches
- Forgetfulness, mood changes and a decreased interest in sex
- Recurrent awakenings or insomnia

Risk and Effects of Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea can affect anyone at any age, even children. However, risk factors for sleep apnea include:

- Male gender
- Being overweight
- Being over the age of forty
- Having a large neck size (17 inches or greater in men and 16 inches or greater in women)
- Having larger tonsils
- Having a family history of sleep apnea

If left untreated, sleep apnea can result in a growing number of health problems including: hypertension, stroke, heart failure, irregular heart beats, and heart attacks.

In addition, untreated sleep apnea may be responsible for poor performance in everyday activities, such as at work and school, motor vehicle crashes, as well as academic underachievement in children and adolescents.

Benefits Corner

Legislative Mandates

The County Health Pool (CHP) is a governmental entity, formed through intergovernmental agreements by each member, giving more ownership and control to the members in determining the structure and content of the benefit plans. This enhances the ability to develop plans that better meet the benefit needs of the membership and allow for more cost control, both present and future, regarding plan changes. The significance of this structure becomes paramount given some of the legislative mandates produced at both the state and federal levels. As members of CHP, you and the Board of Directors are afforded the ability to assess the content of certain legislative mandates in regard to their applicability/affordability for inclusion or exclusion to CHP plan designs as covered benefits.

Although CHP is not exempt from all legislation, those that are optional for the type of program CHP provides, require critical review and analysis. Due to the aforementioned, your participation and input become imperative to the continued success of CHP. It is due to the members' active participation and input that CHP continues to provide the affordable and competitive benefit plan designs to meet members' needs.

We look forward to the coming year and working with all members regarding potentially critical changes to the health care systems. We will keep you apprised of anticipated and proposed changes as they occur during the coming year.

Treatment

Obstructive Sleep Apnea is a treatable condition. The following are the most common treatments:

Positive Airway Pressure (PAP) therapy, also referred to as **CPAP**. This treatment involves wearing a mask at night which is connected to a small machine which blows pressurized air into the mask. The person breathes in and out normally, but the pressurized air they breathe works as a pneumatic split to hold the airway open so they can breathe properly.

Surgery. There are many types of surgical procedures that can help alleviate OSA. Most are geared towards removing or repositioning tissues in the airway to open the airway as much as possible, therefore helping to prevent occlusion.

Oral Appliance. This device resembles a bite guard, but acts to reposition the lower jaw forward helping to open up the airway. Some devices also work to keep the tongue from occluding the airway.

In conclusion, sleep apnea is a serious condition, but once detected, is treatable.

Source: Webmd.com