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Sleep Apnea: What are the signs?

Sleep Apnea is a disorder that affects roughly 5 to 10% of people around the globe.¹ The word “apnea” translates to “breathless,” which aptly describes the symptoms commonly associated with the condition.¹

Risk factors for sleep apnea include carrying extra weight, being older in age, having enlarged tonsils, smoking, using alcohol, and having a narrow throat.⁴

Common signs of sleep apnea include:

- **Snoring, choking, gasping, or struggling to breathe during sleep.** These symptoms occur when throat muscles relax and block airflow into the lungs. During sleep, many people with this disorder experience as many as 5 to 30 episodes each hour.⁴
- **Waking up with a dry mouth.** People with sleep apnea frequently breathe through their mouth during sleep, which can cause mouth dryness.
- **Morning headaches.** While the cause is not entirely clear, up to 18% of patients with sleep apnea report having morning headaches.²
- **Daytime drowsiness.** Feeling sleepy during waking hours is one of the most common symptoms. However, many people attribute sleepiness to general fatigue, and do not recognize the association with sleep apnea.

It is also common for people with this condition to fall asleep when reading, watching TV, or when involved in activities that do not typically require a high level of attention.

To diagnose sleep apnea, your healthcare provider may order a sleep study to learn more about the symptoms you experience when you sleep. Treatments may include lifestyle changes to promote weight loss, adjustments in your sleep positioning, and medication. Additionally, breathing devices, such as a mandibular advancement device (MAD) or a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, can also help keep your airway open as you sleep.³

If you think you may have symptoms of sleep apnea, make a note to bring it up during your next visit with your healthcare provider. Treatment can greatly improve your quality of sleep as well as your quality of life.



1. Cleveland Clinic. [Sleep Apnea](#). Nov 15, 2022. Accessed Sept 7, 2023.
2. Spałka J, Kędzia K, Kuczyński W, Kudrycka A, Małolepsza A, Białasiewicz P, Mokros Ł. Morning Headache as an Obstructive Sleep Apnea-Related Symptom among Sleep Clinic Patients-A Cross-Section Analysis. *Brain Sci.* 2020 Jan 19;10(1):57. doi: 10.3390/brainsci10010057. PMID: 31963788; PMCID: PMC7016602.
3. WebMD. [Obstructive Sleep Apnea: Gadgets and Devices](#). Aug 14, 2022. Accessed Sept 7, 2023.
4. Mayo Clinic. [Sleep Apnea](#). Apr 06, 2023. Accessed Sept 7, 2023.