



HÔTEL-DIEU  
ESTÉ GRACE 1888  
HEALTHCARE

## What is sleep apnea?

Obstructive sleep apnea is a serious breathing problem that interrupts your sleep.

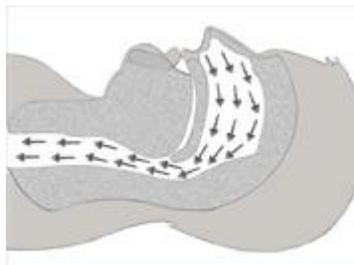
Obstructive sleep apnea means you have short pauses in your breathing when you sleep. These breathing pauses – called **apneas** or **apnea events** – last for 10 to 30 seconds, maybe longer. People with obstructive sleep apnea can stop breathing dozens or hundreds of times each night.

Obstructive sleep apnea (also called OSA or obstructive sleep apnea-hypopnea syndrome) stops you from having the restful sleep you need to stay healthy. If it's not treated, sleep apnea can lead to major health problems, accidents, and early death.

Thankfully, there are excellent treatments for obstructive sleep apnea.

### How obstructive sleep apnea affects your breathing

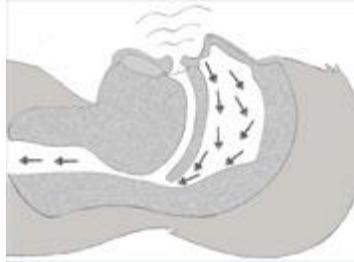
Obstructive sleep apnea stops you from breathing normally at night. If you have obstructive sleep apnea, you probably repeat this cycle while you sleep:



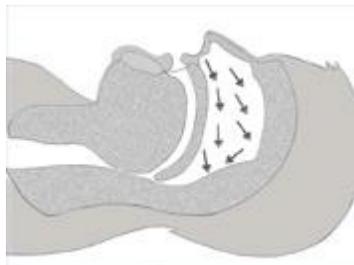
**First**, you may sleep quietly and breathe normally. The air in your airway (breathing tube) flows easily to your lungs.



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**Then, you begin to snore loudly.** This is a sign that your airway is partly blocked. A partly blocked airway means less air can get through to your lungs, and your oxygen level drops. (When doctors see this kind of drop in oxygen level in a sleep test, they call it a hypopnea.)



**Next,** your airway closes off completely. No air reaches your lungs. Your brain is telling you to breathe as usual, but you can't take in a breath because your airway has closed off. This is called apnea. After a pause of 10-30 seconds or more, your brain realizes you haven't been breathing, so it jolts you awake enough for you to take a breath. You take in a big gasp of air and start breathing again.

This cycle can continue through the night: you breathe quietly; you snore; you have a pause in your breathing; you gasp for breath; and you start breathing again. Most people have dozens or hundreds of sleep apnea events a night. This means dozens or hundreds of interruptions of sleep. You can't get the restful sleep you need to be healthy.

The combination of both apnea events (pauses in breathing) and hypopnea events (partly blocked breathing) is called obstructive sleep apnea-hypopnea syndrome (OSAHS).



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## What can make a person's airway collapse during sleep?

There are a few reasons why a person's airway can partly or completely collapse during sleep:

- your throat muscles are too relaxed to hold your airway open
- your tongue blocks your airway
- fatty tissue blocks your airway
- you have a narrow airway

## Who's most at risk for obstructive sleep apnea?

Anyone of any age can get obstructive sleep apnea. Your risk is higher if you have a combination of these risk factors:

- You're obese (very overweight).
- You have a large, thick neck (larger than 17 inches for men; larger than 16 inches for women).
- Your family has a history of obstructive sleep apnea.
- You're older than 40.
- You have large tonsils.
- You have a recessed chin (your chin tucks in) or a remarkable overbite.

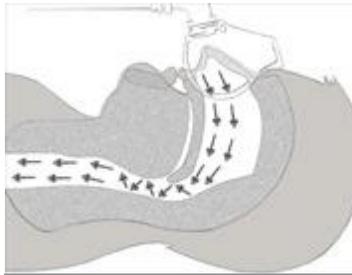
**Children** are at higher risk of sleep apnea if they have large adenoids and tonsils. Tonsils and adenoids are tissues in the back of the throat. You can see tonsils by looking into the mouth. You can't see adenoids – they are higher up in the throat.



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## How does CPAP work?

**CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure)** is the most common and effective treatment for Obstructive Sleep Apnea. The CPAP machine delivers a constant flow of air through tubing and a mask and into your airway. The CPAP machine creates enough pressure in your airway to hold the tissue open, so your airway doesn't collapse.



The soft, steady jet of air from the CPAP machine creates enough pressure to keep the airway open.

Your sleep specialist will prescribe a particular CPAP pressure for you, based on how much pressure you need to keep your airway open. Your sleep specialist may have you try different levels of CPAP pressure when you're in the sleep laboratory, to see which is the right level for you.

CPAP is a treatment, not a cure. While you're using CPAP, your sleep apnea symptoms stop. Your breathing and your sleep are healthy. **If you stop using CPAP, your sleep apnea symptoms will come back.** Your breathing and sleep will be interrupted again.