

## Overview

Do you wake up feeling tired after a full night's sleep? Are you sleepy during the day? Have you been told that you snore loudly or stop breathing during sleep? If so, you may have a primary sleep disorder called sleep apnea. Sleep apnea is common with at least 4% of the adult U.S. population having significant disease. Sleep apnea is more common in older adults but is increasingly recognized in children. If left unrecognized and untreated, sleep apnea can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. Sleep apnea can also predispose to weight gain.

## Signs and Symptoms

The most common signs and symptoms of sleep apnea include:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Loud snoring
- Episodes of breathing cessation during sleep
- Nighttime awakenings
- Morning headache
- Frequent urination at night

## Causes

Obstructive sleep apnea occurs when the muscles in the back of your throat relax. These muscles support the soft palate, the uvula (the triangular piece of tissue hanging from the soft palate), and the tongue. When the muscles relax, your airway narrows, and breathing may be impaired. This may lower the oxygen level in your blood. The brain senses the problem and briefly arouses you from sleep to reopen the airway. This happens again and again and restful sleep is not obtained.

## Risk Factors

- Excess weight
- Neck circumference  
(> 17 inches in men and > 16 inches in women)
- High blood pressure
- A narrowed airway
- Being male
- Being older
- Being post menopausal
- A family history of sleep apnea
- Use of alcohol, sedatives, narcotics or tranquilizers
- Smoking

## **When to Seek Medical Advice**

Consult a medical professional if you experience or your partner observes:

- Snoring loud enough to disturb the sleep of others
- Shortness of breath that awakens you from sleep
- Intermittent pauses in your breathing during sleep
- Excessive daytime drowsiness, which may cause you to fall asleep while you are working, watching television, reading, or driving

The IHA Sleep Disorders Program includes diplomats of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine trained to diagnose and treat the full spectrum of adult and pediatric sleep disorders. For questions or to make an appointment, call **734-712-7688**.