

PEDIATRIC OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA

Quick Facts:

Obstructive sleep apnea is a sleep disorder that occurs in many children. It involves complete or partial obstruction of the upper airway during sleep. Snoring is a common warning sign for sleep apnea. This snoring is usually loud and may end with a gasp for breath. Early identification of sleep apnea is important to ensure your child's normal growth and development.

KEY POINTS:

- **Up to 4% of children will experience sleep apnea.**
- **Early identification of sleep apnea may prevent negative consequences such as daytime sleepiness, irritability, behavioral problems, learning difficulties, and poor academic performance.**
- **Risk factors for developing sleep apnea include large tonsils and obesity.**
- **Your sleep doctor will help you determine if your child needs treatment for sleep apnea.**



How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit www.sleepeducation.org

Am I At Risk:

Most children with obstructive sleep apnea have a history of snoring. Risk factors for sleep apnea include large tonsils, a small chin, and obesity. Sleep apnea also is common in children with down syndrome.

GENERAL OVERVIEW:

Children need healthy sleep in order for their body and brain to develop. Poor sleep in a child can cause sleepiness, irritability, behavioral problems, learning difficulties, and poor academic performance. In severe cases, a child's sleep problem can cause high blood pressure. Obstructive sleep apnea is a common cause of disrupted sleep in children. Sleep apnea often involves brief, cyclic episodes of disturbed breathing. Some children with sleep apnea have longer periods of partial upper airway obstruction.

Sleep apnea typically occurs in conjunction with loud snoring. A child is diagnosed with sleep apnea when breathing stops for short periods during sleep. Children with sleep apnea often have large tonsils and may sleep with their mouths open. They also may sleep in unusual positions, such as sitting up. In addition, they can have headaches, nighttime sweats, and high blood pressure. Children with sleep apnea can be normal weight or obese.

TREATMENTS:

Continuous positive airway pressure therapy (CPAP) provides a stream of air through tubing to a mask that your child wears during sleep. The airflow restores normal breathing by preventing the airway from collapsing.

Weight loss is an important treatment strategy in overweight children who have obstructive sleep apnea.

Adeno-tonsillectomy is a surgery that involves the removal of the adenoids and tonsils. It reduces the airway obstruction and improves breathing.

A sleep doctor can help you decide which treatment option is best for your child. The doctor may advise you to wait before beginning any treatment.

TIPS:

Along with nutrition and exercise, sleep is one of the three pillars of a healthy lifestyle. You can reduce your child's risk of obstructive sleep apnea by encouraging good food choices, daily physical activity and healthy sleep habits.

- Set a regular bedtime and consistent sleep schedule for your child.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine for your child, which may include a soothing bath or story.
- Make sure that your child develops a healthy eating pattern.
- Encourage your child to exercise regularly.
- Help your child maintain a healthy weight.
- During the winter or in dry climates, use a humidifier in your child's bedroom to keep the air moist.

Next Steps:

- Talk to your child's doctor about any ongoing sleep problems to find and treat any underlying causes of sleep obstructive disturbances.
- If your child has sleep apnea, discuss the treatment options with the sleep doctor.
- Continue to monitor your child's sleep, breathing, daytime alertness and behavior.
- The sleep doctor may schedule your child for a sleep study if your child has symptoms of a sleep disorder such as sleep apnea.
- Your child may need a repeat sleep study after any treatment to confirm resolution of sleep apnea.



Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you and your child see their doctor.



Sample Questions:

Why does my child feel tired all the time?

What is a CPAP machine and how can it help my child
