

**Brief Communication**

**Don't Dismiss Snoring as "Natural"**

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Often, snoring is dismissed as an accepted part of aging. Though it's true that snoring can increase over time with age and weight gain, it should not be recognized as an ordinary and standard juncture in life. It can and often should be treated – for the sake of the snorer and their partner. About 90 million Americans suffer from snoring activity during sleep.<sup>1</sup> Snoring is more common in males and overweight people and generally worsens with age. Snoring may be a sign of obstructed breathing; it should not be taken casually.<sup>2</sup>

Snoring is defined as a coarse sound made by vibrations of the soft palate and other tissue in the mouth, nose & throat (upper airway). It is produced by turbulence inside the airway during inspiration. The turbulence is originated by a fractional blockage that may be positioned anywhere from the tip of the nose to the vocal cords. The restriction may arise only during sleep, or it may persist all the time and be worse when patient sleeps, because muscle tone is reduced during sleep and there may be insufficient muscle tone to prevent the airway tissue vibrating.<sup>3</sup> People who snore may suffer from reduced muscle tone in the tongue and throat, Extreme bulkiness of throat tissue, Long soft palate or uvula and obstructed nasal airways.<sup>2</sup>

Sleep apnea is a common disorder in which one or more pauses in breathing or shallow breaths while sleeping. Breathing gaps can last from a few seconds to minutes. They may occur 30 times or more an hour.<sup>4</sup> In untreated sleep apnea, breathing is briefly interrupted or becomes very shallow during sleep. These breathing gaps typically last between 10 to 20 seconds and can occur up to hundreds of times

a night. As a consequence, patient spend more time in light sleep and less time in the deep, restorative sleep is needed to be energetic and mentally sharp. This chronic sleep deficiency results in daytime sleepiness, sluggish reflexes, reduced concentration, and higher risk of accidents. Sleep apnea can also lead to severe health problems over time like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and weight gain.<sup>5</sup>

There are three types of sleep apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea is the very common form of sleep apnea. It arises when the soft tissue in the back of throat relaxes during sleep and blocks the airway, repeatedly results in loud snoring. Central sleep apnea is a much less common form of sleep apnea that consists of the central nervous system, occurring when the brain fails to signal the muscles that control breathing. People with central sleep apnea rarely snore. Complex sleep apnea is a combination of both obstructive sleep apnea and central sleep apnea.<sup>5</sup>

People with sleep apnea may complain of too much daytime sleepiness often with irritability or restlessness. But it is normal that bed partner, family or friends who notice the symptoms first. Sufferers may experience some of the following:

- ❖ Extremely loud heavy snoring, often interrupted by pauses and gasps
- ❖ Excessive daytime sleepiness, e.g., falling asleep at work, whilst driving, during conversation or when watching TV. (This should not be confused with excessive tiredness with which we all suffer from time to time)
- ❖ Morning headaches

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- ❖ Forgetfulness
- ❖ Changes in mood or behavior
- ❖ Anxiety or depression
- ❖ Decreased interest in sex
- ❖ daytime fatigue and sleepiness,
- ❖ insomnia,
- ❖ poor concentration and attention,
- ❖ Difficulty performing work duties.
- ❖ Memory or learning problems and not being able to concentrate
- ❖ Feeling irritable, depressed, or having mood swings or personality changes
- ❖ Waking up frequently to urinate
- ❖ Dry mouth or sore throat when you wake up.<sup>5</sup>

Remember, not everyone who has these symptoms will necessarily have sleep apnea. We possibly all suffer from these symptoms from time to time but people with sleep apnea demonstrate some or all of these symptoms all the time.<sup>6</sup>

Snoring may be a sign of a more severe state known as obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). OSA is characterized by numerous episodes of breathing gaps more than 10 seconds at a time, due to upper airway narrowing or collapse. This results in lower amounts of oxygen in the blood, which causes the heart to work harder. It also causes disturbance of the natural sleep cycle, which makes people feel poorly rested despite adequate time in bed. Apnea patients may experience 30 to 300 such events per night.<sup>2</sup>

All snorers with any of the following symptoms should be evaluated for possible obstructive sleep apnea:

- ❖ Witnessed episodes of breath pauses or apnea during sleep
- ❖ Daytime sleepiness or fatigue

- ❖ High blood pressure
- ❖ Heart disease
- ❖ History of a stroke.<sup>2</sup>

More than just a noisy irritation, snoring and sleep apnea can have serious health ramifications. OSA sufferers frequently move out of deep sleep into light sleep when their breathing pauses and this reduces sleep quality. OSA can also trigger the discharge of stress hormones that changes how body uses energy, and make feel tired and sleepy during the day. In addition, there are several potential negative health effects of insufficient sleep, such as weight gain, memory loss, skin aging and more. There is also evidence that OSA leads to a more risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke, congestive heart failure, atrial fibrillation, diabetes, certain cancers and even sudden death<sup>3</sup>. Treating either disorder can reduce these risks. While the snorer may not feel that the condition is disrupting his or her sleep, the partner being kept up all night by the noise may feel differently. Relationships can severely suffer if partners are irritated about being kept awake or having to sleep in separate rooms. Over 41 percent of women who say they need a good night's sleep instead have it interrupted by a snoring partner. The deficiency of sleep or need for nighttime separation can foster resentment and decrease intimacy in relationships.

There are additional health risks from lack of consistent high-quality sleep, including being more prone to accidents, difficulty focusing, impaired attention and alertness, as well as other serious risks such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes. This lack of sleep can promote weight gain while also accelerating the aging of the skin and brain.<sup>3</sup>

**Conflict of Interest:** None Declared

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