

# The Sleep Apnea Fat Factor

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Have you noticed that your waist has been getting a little thicker, while your nutritional habits haven't changed much? Do you feel lethargic and blame it on your weight gain without considering how much shuteye you're getting?

The problem could be associated with a disorder called sleep apnea. This might be the sole cause or one of several contributing factors, but it's imperative that you understand the connection so that you can solve the problem and start shedding pounds.

## **What Is Sleep Apnea?**

Sleep apnea is a condition where you stop breathing! Most times, you gasp or snort yourself away and start breathing again, but in some fatal cases, you don't. It's usually a bad sign if you snore at night that sleep apnea is an issue for you.

Sleep apnea can be divided into two types. One's pretty common and it's known as obstructive sleep apnea. Central sleep apnea is the other kind, and it's less common.

With central sleep apnea, your brain just isn't signaling to your body that you need to breathe. While you're cognizant of it during waking hours, you aren't aware and controlling it while you're asleep.

Obstructive sleep apnea is when the muscles in your throat relax too much, so that air doesn't flow. It's obstructed by the throat muscles and until you gasp, snore or snort yourself through it, you're not breathing.

When you stop breathing, it might be for just a split second, or it can be minutes long. Imagine not breathing for minutes! If you have a spouse sleeping with you, it can be terrifying to them to hear you stop snoring and

a minute later gasp yourself awake. It also disrupts their sleep, but that's a topic for another time.

This type of condition leaves you tired because you never are able to get into a deep sleep – your sleep is always shallow. You'll be overly tired during the day, stressed and possibly using food to keep up your energy.

Sleep apnea doesn't just happen to people who have weight problems. It can happen to anyone – but it does sometimes lead to weight issues on down the road.

Sleep apnea isn't something you ever want to ignore. You might joke about snoring from time to time, but this is something that can have serious health consequences for you.

This isn't a temporary diagnosis like the flu where it comes and goes with a little medicine. With sleep apnea, you have to think long-term treatments and a commitment to changing some habits you've formed.

When most people think about sleep apnea, they think about the snoring or gasping involved – about the noise that it makes. What you should really be concerning yourself with is the lack of oxygen flowing through your blood whenever your breathing is brought to an abrupt halt.

Your brain is the one that jolts you awake – it recognizes the lack of oxygen and gives you a silent alarm so that you can catch your breath. Most people don't even know this has happened to them during the night.

The disruption is so mild that it doesn't fully wake you up in most cases. It might wake up someone else in the room. But even though you don't fully wake up, it means you never fully go into a deep sleep, which leaves you feeling tired and irritable.

Central sleep apnea is a little scarier. While obstructive sleep apnea relies on your brain to sound an alarm that you're not breathing, in this type of sleep apnea, there's no signal – that's the problem!

You might gasp and wake up because of the physical struggle you're having to breathe. Most people who suffer with this form can't sleep for long periods of time – and they can't even fall asleep easily.

This form of sleep apnea is usually the result of a stroke or heart failure. Because the waking process is harder, you'll typically remember how many times you woke up during the night, and it can be very frustrating.

Who has sleep apnea – just the overweight? Just the elderly? No! In fact, thin people and even children can get sleep apnea. Both men and women can suffer from it – and it usually goes undiagnosed until there's someone else sleeping in the room to tell you about it.

## **What Causes Sleep Apnea?**

There are many things that can cause you to suffer from obstructive sleep apnea. Eve having a narrow throat or enlarged tonsils can ignite a flurry of sleep apnea episodes.

Being overweight can certainly contribute to it. That's just because the fat stores surrounding your breathing tubes help block the air! When most people lose weight, their sleep apnea disappears, or at least gets much better in terms of its severity. But it's not always a weight issue. Thin people suffer from it, too.

While both men and women can suffer from sleep apnea, it's usually men who have it more often. In fact, women are half as likely to have it than men. For women, the risk rises after 50 years old – and whenever they gain too much weight.

While children can suffer from sleep apnea, this isn't the most common age group to have it. It's usually men and women over the age of 60 – senior citizens – who suffer the most.

When it comes to race, age factors into the equation. While all races can suffer from sleep apnea, African Americans have it more often under the age of 35 than any other race.

Bad habits can cause sleep apnea. The lifestyle changes you might have to commit to include smoking cessation, since smokers are three times more likely to suffer from it and discontinuing the use of alcohol.

You may notice that on nights when you've had a few cocktails, your sleep apnea worsens. That's because your already relaxed muscles become even more relaxed – so not only is alcohol out, but so are any other kinds of sedatives.

What about genetics – do they play a role? Actually, yes! Your family history is important to know. What's not good is that many of your relatives might have dismissed it as snoring, without going to get it diagnosed and treated properly.

It's certainly not something people sit around and talk about at a holiday dinner. You might have to actively initiate the conversation with your family members to see if anyone else is having the same symptoms.

Some people snore when they're hit with sinus issues. This isn't true sleep apnea – but if you suffer from constant allergies, then you might find that to be the cause – and the right kind of treatment could clear it right up!

When it comes to the less common form - central sleep apnea – you're going to see many of the same contributing factors. Age (over 65), male, and people with heart disorders or events like a stroke.

The reason these all play a role in central sleep apnea is that the mind's ability to function deteriorates in some cases, rendering it ineffective at functioning for proper breathing during the night.

## **The Clear Connection Between Sleep Apnea and Weight Gain**

There's a problem in connecting the health issue of sleep apnea with weight gain. It's one of those "chicken or the egg" situations where either one could come first.

You might be overweight, which has caused you to suffer from obstructive sleep apnea. Or, you might develop sleep apnea first, causing you to develop sleep apnea.

The Harvard Nurses' Study reported that when people get less sleep, which means less than five hours a night, they increase their risk of packing on pounds by 15%.

Visceral fat, which is fat that gets added around your abdomen area, is more likely to accumulate on men, according to a Japanese study at the Kyoto University Graduate School of Medicine.

In a study funded by the NIH (National Institutes of Health), researchers found that a person's body mass index (BMI) was directly connected to how severe a patient's sleep apnea was.

Another study at the University of Colorado in Boulder compared the traditional "calories in, calories expended" advice to situations where sleep was the control factor. What they found was that when people didn't get enough sleep, they ate more! Eating more meant they gained more.

What was very telling was when they ate – when a person who lacks ample sleep at night eats in an effort to pick them up from an afternoon energy slump. This gave their body less time to burn off the calories for the day.

The participants were split up, with some being allowed a luxurious nine hours of sleep, and others getting only five. For a full five days, they went through this – and all of them had access to food at all times.

The food wasn't just healthy food. They were offered everything on the spectrum – fruits and vegetables as well as fat-laden ice creams and chips. When the five days were up, the groups switched patterns so that researchers could observe the changes in each individual.

You may be surprised to hear that those who slept less burned more calories. But unfortunately, they also ate more calories – 1% more than they burned. This packed on two pounds for them during the sleep study.

Imagine just five days adding two pounds to your frame. Now consider 4 weeks, three months or even a year of being sleep deprived and you can see how sleep apnea can affect your size.

Those who got ample sleep actually wound up losing a bit of weight! Women were more prone than men to gain weight when they were sleep deprived. But both groups definitely showed better nutritional habits when they got plenty of sleep during the night!

## **Sleep Apnea Has the Potential to Kill You**

We all know that obesity contributes to disease. Whether it's diabetes or heart disease – or even cancer, being overweight can torpedo your health completely. If sleep apnea is causing you to add weight month after month – year after year – it's time you got control of this issue.

In the Journal of the American College of Cardiology, it was reported that the Mayo clinic conducted a sleep study where 78% of participants suffered from sleep apnea. One hundred and forty-two patients had a sudden cardiac arrest out of 7,800 people.

Aside from heart attacks, people who suffer from sleep apnea often have high blood pressure, risk of stroke, risk of complications when going under anesthesia, memory problems, chronic fatigue and more.

Even your liver fails to function properly when you have sleep apnea, and you might feel depressed or have chronic headaches. Some sleep apnea sufferers report an abnormally low libido, too.

## **How to Get Diagnosed to See If You Need Treatment**

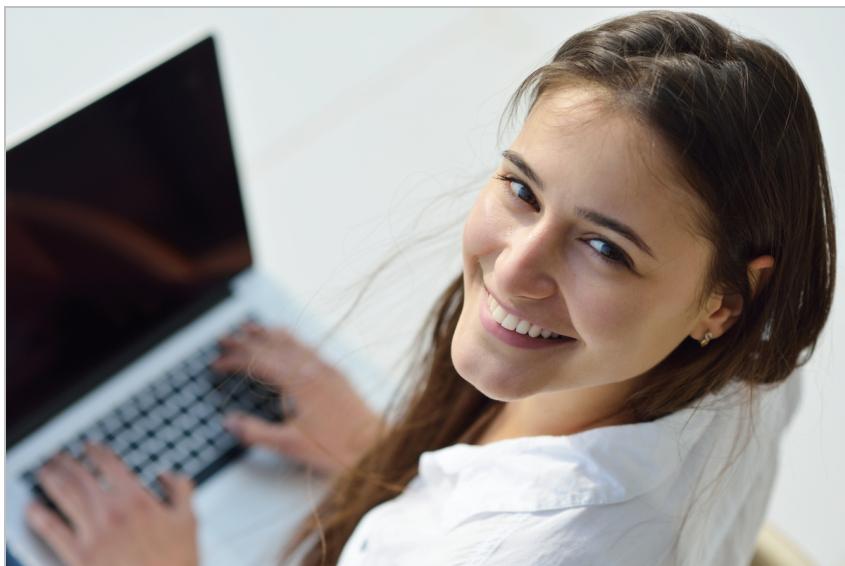
If you have someone close to you who tells you that you snore or gasp during the night, take the news as a serious sign of symptoms and ask your doctor for a sleep study.

If there's no one to alert you to it, then you might recognize other symptoms like lethargy or fatigue, sore throat and dry mouth, headaches that happen frequently, and a lack of clarity in your thought process.

A sleep study can help you find out what's going on. You stay overnight and they monitor your breathing. Sometimes you can get a home test so that you're sleeping in your usual environment.

If it's confirmed that you have sleep apnea, then you have many options that you can try. A sleep mask (CPAP) is very popular because it forces oxygen through the relaxed muscles to ensure you never stop breathing.

There are also other treatment possibilities you can look into, such as a mouthpiece, electronic stimulation therapy (to strengthen the muscles that collapse), and even lifestyle changes like losing weight, avoiding alcohol, and sleeping on your side!



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