



The Secret Behind Snoring

Uncovering The Health Risks For Women Who Snore

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BEDROOM stays in the bedroom. At least that seems to be the attitude of many women with a secret that they struggle to keep silent in the night—the men in their lives aren't the only ones who snore.

"In women, especially in older women, the fact that they snore carries some degree of embarrassment, almost a stigma," said Dr. Amy Aronsky, medical director of The Center for Sleep Disorders at St. John Medical Center in Longview, Washington.

Giving the silent treatment to the problem of snoring, however, can put women's health at risk by ignoring a much greater danger.

Although Terri Nichols, 46, of Longview, WA, snored loudly for years, neither she nor her doctors connected it to her complaints of fatigue and low energy. Instead, she often was told that her problems might be related to hormones or depression.

"I told my doctors, 'I'm not depressed, I'm exhausted,'" said Nichols. Eventually one of her doctors convinced her to visit Aronsky's sleep center, where an overnight sleep study confirmed the cause of Nichols' exhaustion: obstructive sleep apnea.

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, sleep apnea is a com-

mon sleep disorder that affects about four percent of men and two percent of women, and most adults who have it are undiagnosed. Loud and frequent snoring is one symptom of sleep apnea, and the hormone changes that occur during menopause put women at a much greater risk of developing it.

Sleep apnea occurs when soft tissue in the back of the throat collapses and blocks the upper airway during sleep. As a result, breathing can stop hundreds of times per night, ruining sleep quality and leading to severe health complications such as heart disease and stroke.

Aronsky started Nichols on the most effective sleep apnea treatment, "continuous positive airway pressure," or CPAP. It keeps the airway open by providing a steady stream of air through a mask that you wear as you sleep.

Initially hesitant to wear a mask, Nichols was hooked once she gave CPAP a try. "I slept all night for the first time in a very long time," she said. CPAP kept her breathing as she slept, and it also brought about a remarkable exchange: Her energy reappeared, and her weight disappeared. Since beginning CPAP therapy about six months ago, Nichols has lost more than 90 pounds.

"I couldn't have done it without the sleep," she said. "When you're that tired, everything you do is an effort."

For the millions of women with sleep apnea who remain undiagnosed, Aronsky believes that it is time for a wake-up call. There is hope, she says, and they can find help.

"Women are different from men, and we don't have to accept feeling tired," she said. "You don't have to just say, 'That's the way it is; this is a part of getting older.'"

Medical help for a sleep-related problem is available at nearly 1,000 sleep centers and labs that are accredited by the AASM, including 26 providers in Washington and 16 in Oregon.

For more information about sleep disorders, go online to www.sleepeducation.com or call The Center for Sleep Disorders at (360) 414-7800.

WARNING SIGNS FOR SLEEP APNEA

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, the following list shows some of the most common factors and warning signs for sleep apnea in women. Discuss these statements with your doctor or a sleep specialist if any of them describe your health and your sleep:

You normally feel tired even after a full night of sleep.

You are overweight with a body mass index (BMI) of 25 or more.

You have experienced unexplained weight gain or are having a hard time losing weight.

You have high blood pressure.

You are post-menopausal.

You snore loudly and frequently.

You make choking or snort-sounding sounds during sleep.

You stop breathing during sleep.

You have a neck size of 16 inches or more.

You fall asleep while driving or during periods of daytime inactivity.

You have a family member who has sleep apnea.



SLEEP TIPS FOR WOMEN

Make your bedroom a comfortable and safe place. Reduce noises and extreme temperatures that might disturb you.

Use light and comfortable bed linens and garments.

Go to bed only when you are sleepy and use the bed only for sleeping and sex.

Begin rituals to help you relax at bedtime, such as taking a soothing bath or enjoying a light snack.

Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, including weekends and holidays.

If you need to take a nap, keep it to less than one hour and take it before 3 p.m.

Only drink caffeine in the morning, and avoid alcohol and cigarettes late in the day.

Stay away from fatty, spicy foods that are likely to upset your stomach or cause heartburn.

Set aside time during the day to get all of your worries out of your system.

Increase vitamin E in your diet, or take a vitamin E supplement.

Hormone replacement therapy may help you sleep better by relieving severe hot flashes related to menopause. Ask your doctor for advice about this kind of treatment.

Avoid sleeping pills or use them cautiously under the supervision of a doctor.

Talk to your doctor or a sleep specialist if you have an ongoing problem related to your sleep.

Provided by the **American Academy of Sleep Medicine**