

DRAFT
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SNORING MAY BE MORE THAN JUST AN ANNOYANCE

WEST POINT, Miss.—Individuals who are diagnosed with a potentially serious sleep disorder aren't the only ones suffering. Often their bedmates and other family members lose sleep over it too.

Snoring may indicate a more serious hidden problem, according to Andrew Wartak, M.D., a board-certified internal medicine physician who serves as medical director of North Mississippi Medical Center-West Point's Sleep Disorders Laboratory. Dr. Wartak is also a diplomate of the American Board of Sleep Medicine.

"Sleep apnea is a condition characterized by loud snoring, pauses in breathing, then gasps for air," he said. "People with sleep apnea repeatedly stop breathing because upper airway tissue structures collapse during sleep." With each episode, they have to wake up to breathe again but never realize it.

If a sleep disorder is suspected, the physician will conduct an extensive evaluation and order a polysomnogram, or overnight sleep study. This sleep study monitors a person's heart, lung and brain activity, as well as breathing patterns, blood oxygen levels, and arm and leg movements.

In addition to its immediate effects—daytime sleepiness, fatigue, headache—sleep apnea is a risk factor for a number of medical problems. Heavy snorers have more high blood pressure, strokes and heart attacks than the general public.

Because it occurs during sleep, apnea can easily go undetected by the patient; it is often the spouse who first notices the warning signs. In addition to loud, irregular snoring, snorting and gasping for breath, Dr. Wartak suggests watching for pauses in breathing, restless sleep or sudden body movements before the person starts to breathe again, and excessive sweating during sleep.

Treatment for sleep apnea varies from person to person. Some people experience significant relief by simply losing excess weight. Others need a special device to improve breathing during sleep, and a few patients may need surgery to correct any obstruction in the upper nose and throat.

Many patients find relief with nasal continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) by sleeping with a small, lightweight mask over their nose. The device forces air through the mask and into nasal passages. The constant, continuous air pressure is adjusted so that it is just enough to prevent the throat from collapsing during sleep.

National Sleep Awareness Week, March 7-13, is an annual public education and awareness campaign to promote the importance of sleep. The week begins with the announcement of the National Sleep Foundation's *Sleep in America* poll results and ends with the clock change to Daylight Saving Time, where Americans lose one hour of sleep.

Dr. Wartak and the staff of the NMMC-West Point Sleep Disorders Laboratory help people overcome sleep apnea, narcolepsy, chronic insomnia and other sleep disorders. For more information, ask your physician or call (662) 495-2143 or 1-800-THE DESK (1-800-843-3375).

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Sidebar:

Here are some tips for improving your sleep:

- Establish consistent sleep and wake schedules, even on weekends
- Create a regular, relaxing bedtime routine such as soaking in a hot bath or listening to soothing music – begin an hour or more before the time you expect to fall asleep
- Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool
- Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows
- Use your bedroom only for sleep and sex (keep “sleep stealers” out of the bedroom – avoid watching TV, using a computer or reading in bed)
- Finish eating at least two to three hours before your regular bedtime
- Exercise regularly during the day or at least a few hours before bedtime
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol products close to bedtime and give up smoking