

Strained snoring

When snoring becomes so severe that it interferes with breathing during the night, the patient has more than loss of sleep to worry about.



Loud and chronic snoring could signal a condition known as obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA), a disorder where the airways are repeatedly blocked during sleep such that breathing stops. In severe cases, breathing can stop several hundred times a night, leaving the body deprived of oxygen. Symptoms of OSA include:

- Loud, abrasive, chronic snoring
- Disturbed sleep due to frequent awakenings, choking or coughing
- Chronic fatigue, inattention and poor memory that affects work or school
- Excessive daytime sleepiness

About one in three Singaporeans — men, women and children — have moderate to severe OSA. Left untreated, it increases the risk of heart attack and stroke. This is because disturbed sleep can lead to an increase in inflammatory markers that give rise to a host of problems. OSA is linked to drug-resistant high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, early onset dementia, depression and a higher risk of vehicular accidents.

OSA in children

About 3–12% of children snore; of this number 1–10% are affected by OSA. In most cases, the symptoms are mild and many children outgrow the condition. However, the consequences of untreated OSA, like that for adults, have their consequences. It can lead to attention-deficit disorder, behavioural problems, poor academic performance and cardiopulmonary disease.

OSA in women


OSA is quite common in women, but the condition is underdiagnosed because they don't

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usually present the classic signs. Not all women with OSA are middle-aged or overweight. Instead of snoring or wakefulness, OSA in women can present as fatigue, insomnia, morning headaches, restless leg syndrome or mood disturbances. However, the consequences of OSA in women are similar to that in men.

What to do about OSA

If you suspect you, your spouse or child has OSA, seek help from an ENT specialist, who may start a medical history or a sleep study to diagnose and assess the severity of the condition. The conservative approach is weight loss for those who are obese, avoiding alcohol close to bedtime and sleeping on one's side.

If the obstruction is due to allergies, medications may be prescribed. Oral appliances may also be recommended in the form of a mouth piece that enlarges the space in the mouth or a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine, which pumps a continuous flow of air into the airways. In some cases, surgery may be recommended if the problem lies with too-narrow nasal or oral passages. Children with enlarged tonsils, for instance, may benefit from surgery to help widen the passages. 



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