



## ***Obstructive Sleep Apnea & Snoring***

### **What is Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome?**

The sleep of normal children and adults is accompanied by relaxation of the muscles that stiffen and open the throat. This muscular relaxation leads to slight sleep-related narrowing of the throat that is of no importance to most individuals. In people with Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome (OSAS), the sleep-related throat narrowing is so great that breathing becomes difficult. The brain senses this difficulty and increases the effort to breathe. Increased effort to breathe briefly awakens the brain in order to stiffen and open the throat. Once awake with a fully open throat, the effort to breathe decreases. As breathing effort returns to normal, the person resumes sleep and the cycle of falling asleep, throat narrowing, raised effort to breathe, and then arousal from sleep repeats itself. The cycle can disturb sleep dozens to hundreds of times per night. Most of the obstructive breathing episodes and awakenings are brief so that they are not remembered. The person with this pattern of sleep is said to have OSAS.

If you have OSAS, you may not get enough oxygen during sleep and probably do not sleep soundly. You may suffer daytime sleepiness that affects your work and other social activities, and may even lead to car accidents. OSAS can also put you at risk for high blood pressure, heart failure, heart attack, or stroke. The warning signs of OSAS are:

- Snoring so loudly that it rivals a jackhammer and can be heard rooms away.
- A particular pattern of snoring interrupted by pauses, then gasps.
- Falling asleep at inappropriate times, such as at work or while driving.
- Trouble concentrating and becoming unusually forgetful, irritable, anxious, or depressed.
- Morning headaches, frequent nighttime urination, loss of interest in sex.
- Male impotence.
- Female menstrual irregularities.
- OSAS most often strikes overweight men.

### **How is Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome Treated?**

Be sure to see a healthcare professional about the symptoms and treatments of OSAS. OSAS is a potentially life threatening disorder. If you are diagnosed with OSAS, you may benefit from both general measures and specific treatments.

- Normalize weight.
- Avoid alcohol within four hours of bedtime.
- Avoid sleeping pills.
- Take all drugs with care.
- Sleep lying on one side.
- Positive airway pressure therapy. (A light mask worn over the nose during sleep. Pressure from an air compressor forces air through the nasal passages and into the throat.)
- Oral appliances. (Devices that open the airway by bringing the jaw, tongue, and soft palette forward.)
- Surgery. (Removal of enlarged tonsils and adenoids, nasal polyps or other growths, correction of deviated nasal septum or abnormally formed jaw or soft palette.
- Uvulopalatopharyngoplasty (UPPP). (A procedure which removes excess tissue at the back of the throat.
- Medication.