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## Sleep apnea: What you need to know



Sleep apnea isn't just about snoring or getting up tired. It's about your brain waking you over and over again through the night to get you to breathe. Not only do you miss out on restorative sleep, but the multiple interruptions in breathing also put extra strain on your heart. That puts you at risk of high blood pressure, heart attack, or stroke. And the poor sleep may cause fatigue, fuzzy memory, poor concentration, and feelings of

depression. Luckily, there are many options to effectively manage this condition.

**There are three main types of sleep apnea.** With all types, your body reflexively awakens you just enough to get you breathing again, but this disturbs your sleep cycle.

- Obstructive sleep apnea: The most common type. Throat muscles relax and block your airway, or you have excess airway tissue.
- Central sleep apnea: The brain doesn't send the right signals to the breathing muscles.
- Complex sleep apnea: A mix of obstructive and central symptoms.

**Common risk factors.** Being age sixty-plus. Carrying extra weight, which can narrow your airway. Being male, a smoker, drinking heavily, or having heart disease or nasal congestion increases your chances significantly. Also, use of opioids, tranquilizers, or sleeping pills.

**Getting a diagnosis.** If you *think* you might have sleep apnea, talk to your doctor about your symptoms. Your doctor may ask you to do a sleep study, either at a clinic or at home. These tests measure your breathing patterns and oxygen levels to confirm the diagnosis.

**Questions to ask.** If you are diagnosed with sleep apnea, get detailed information. Ask your doctor: What type of sleep apnea do I have? What types of treatment are possible? Which would suit me best? Is there a specialist who can help me through the next steps?

### Top treatments

- CPAP machines: A face mask delivers steady air pressure to keep your airways open. May require trying several styles to find the best fit.
- Oral appliances: These adjust your jaw or tongue to prevent blockage.
- Lifestyle changes: Losing weight, quitting smoking, and/or sleeping on your side.
- Surgery: Used in rare cases to remove tissue or reposition the jaw.

If you find that you're avoiding using a suggested device, talk again with your doctor about options. Find something that works for you. Your life and quality of life depend on it!

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Aging Wisdom supports individuals and families in King and south Snohomish Counties as they plan for aging.



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