OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Katie Gravesen, DC

Stop Snoring for Better Health

Snoring is a nighttime nuisance for many people, whether they snore or share a bedroom with a snorer. About 25 percent of women and 40 percent of men snore regularly. Chronic snoring can be more than an annoyance — it can signal serious health problems. Dr. Gravesen pulls the covers back on the causes and effects of snoring — and offers sensible advice for a peaceful night's sleep.

The Mechanics of Snoring

Simply put, snoring is the result of a partially blocked upper airway, explains Dr. Gravesen. The obstructed flow of air vibrates tissue in the back of the throat, causing sound to come from the nose, mouth or both. Chronic snoring happens most often during REM — the sleep stage associated with memorable dreams — and deep or slow-wave sleep.

Several factors contribute to snoring. Obesity is a common cause because excess fat obstructs the throat. Various physical abnormalities may also be responsible, such as large tonsils or a deviated septum (the cartilage wall dividing the nostrils). An abnormally long, soft palate or uvula may also contribute to snoring.

Snoring can also be a result of relaxed muscles in the throat. This is typical with advanced age, explaining why snoring becomes more common in one's later years. Alcohol and sleeping pills also relax throat muscles and potentially lead to snoring.

Not all snoring is chronic. Nasal congestion or inflammation from allergies, a cold or even pregnancy, up your chances of a temporary snoring problem.

Sleep Apnea

If you are a chronic loud snorer, it's a good idea to talk to a healthcare professional about whether you may have *sleep apnea*.

Severe snoring is a hallmark of sleep apnea, along with lapses of 10 seconds or longer in breathing. These lapses cause a person with sleep apnea to partially wake up gasping for air. The person is usually not aware of waking and doesn't remember it the next day, but the repeated sleep interruptions exact a heavy toll on daytime energy and alertness.

Sleep apnea can affect children and adults. Because it cannot be detected by a regular physical exam, it often goes undiagnosed — one study suggests that as many as one in 15 people suffer from sleep apnea (*Expert Rev Respir Med* 2008;2:349-64).

Health Risks of Snoring

Research implicates that sleep apnea and snoring are associated with a myriad of serious conditions. For starters, scientists identify sleep apnea as a secondary cause of hypertension (*Am J Cardiol* 2010;105:1135-9).

Obstructed breathing lowers the level of oxygen in the blood, forcing the heart to pump harder, which increases blood pressure. High blood pressure boosts the risk of heart attack and stroke.

A study presented at the meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies in Baltimore describes monitoring snorers and non-snorers as they sleep. The data revealed that snoring elevates blood pressure.

Snoring may also be a risk factor for carotid atherosclerosis — the "hardening" of the main artery to the head and neck. An investigation correlated laboratory snoring data with diagnosis of carotid atherosclerosis in 110 adults. Carotid atherosclerosis was present in 20 percent of mild snorers, 32 percent of moderate snorers, and a whopping 65 percent of heavy snorers. Even after adjusting for factors like age, smoking history and hypertension, researchers still found a significant association between heavy snoring and carotid atherosclerosis (*Sleep* 2008;33:1081-85).

Katie Gravesen, DC, Sol Chiropractic (808) 270-2530
30 E Lipoa #4-102, Kihei, HI 96753 www.solchiro.com

The lack of oxygen caused by the same obstruction that generates snoring produces adrenaline, the stress hormone. Adrenaline triggers an increase in blood sugar, which may explain research linking snoring with diabetes. A study following 812 adults over three years found that loud snoring predicted high blood sugar and other symptoms of metabolic syndrome. Loud snorers were more than twice as likely as others to develop high blood sugar by the end of the study (*Sleep* 2010;33:1633-40).

A study of the spouses of chronic snorers is telling of the effect snoring can have on those who share a bed with snorers. An overnight sleep study monitored ten men with sleep apnea and their wives. Halfway through the night, the men put on continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) devices, a mask-like treatment that uses a stream of air to keep the airway open.

Not only the men but also their wives experienced much higher-quality sleep when the devices were in use. In fact, researchers estimate that treating snoring gives spouses an average of an hour more sleep per night (*Mayo Clin Proc* 1999;74:955-8).

Take Steps Against Snoring

Where should you start if you have a snoring problem? One of the best things to curtail snoring is to lose excess weight. The pressure of extra flesh on the airway makes nighttime breathing difficult, and obesity further increases the risk of the health condition. Research confirms that snoring increases with body mass index (BMI), as well as with neck and waist measurements (*Chest* 2006;129:933-94).

Another anti-snoring technique that helps many people is to simply change positions. Sleeping on your back can make the tongue fall back into the throat and block the airway. Sleeping on your side opens up the airway.

Certain medications can relax muscles and make apnea more likely, as can alcohol. Eliminate or restrict alcohol consumption and sedating medications like painkillers and sleeping pills, particularly in the evening.

CPAP may be necessary for moderate to severe sleep apnea that does not respond to these measures. Oral appliances worn at night to hold the airway open are another option.

Various surgeries are possible for permanently widening the airway by removing tissue or shifting the jaw, but these should be approached with extreme caution as they can be quite painful and require weeks of recovery time. In particular, children who undergo adenotonsillectomy (surgical removal of adenoids and tonsils) have a high rate of recurrence of snoring and other breathing difficulties, making the procedure worth a second opinion (*Am J Respir Crit Care Med* 2008;177:654-9).

Chiropractic Can Help

Vertebral subluxations are areas of misalignment in the spine that contribute to a variety of conditions. Chiropractors are trained to correct vertebral subluxations with gentle maneuvers called ***chiropractic adjustments***.

Sleep apnea and accompanying snoring can be the result of structural dysfunction in the neck. A revealing study describes the correlation between vertebral subluxations and snoring — as shown in X-rays of 138 patients (*J Vert Sublux Res* 1999;3:9-23).

Our chiropractic office also offers patients nutritional and wellness guidance. A just-released case study describes a 55-year-old sleep apnea patient who had relied on a CPAP device for 10 years. After three months of dietary modifications recommended by his chiropractor, he was able to breathe comfortably at night without the use of CPAP and has done so for seven years (*J Chiro Med* Epub 2011).

If snoring is standing between you and a good night's sleep — and possibly your health — call us today to schedule a consultation.