

Sleep Apnea and Heart Failure

When a person stops breathing while sleeping, it is called sleep apnea. The person may stop breathing for just a few seconds or for more than 30 seconds over and over again when they are sleeping. Often the person does not know there is a problem.

People with heart failure have a high risk for also having sleep apnea. If not treated, sleep apnea can cause:

- Drops in oxygen levels
- The heart rate to speed up
- A rise in the blood pressure
- Changes to the heart rhythm
- Heart attack or an episode of heart failure
- Stroke

Sleep apnea in people with heart failure may be due to congestion in the neck veins or weakness in the muscles of the throat and windpipe. This can narrow or block the airway during sleep. The tongue may move back over the airway or the tonsils may be large and this blocks the flow of air as the person sleeps.

Sleep apnea can be treated to improve your sleep and your quality of life. If you are a person with heart failure and you have any signs of sleep apnea, talk to your doctor about having a sleep study.

Learn more about your health care.

Signs of sleep apnea

- Loud snoring, often only noticed by the bed partner
- Gaspings or choking when sleeping
- Feeling tired or sleepy during the day
- Not feeling rested after sleeping or waking with a headache or dry mouth
- The bed partner may notice pauses in breathing during sleep
- Problems with memory and not being able to concentrate
- Feeling irritable

Treatment of sleep apnea in people with heart failure

The most effective treatment for sleep apnea is the use of positive airway pressure while sleeping. A mask or large tube called a cannula is worn over or inside the nose while you sleep. Warm, humidified air is delivered through the tubing and mask to keep the airway open. This is called CPAP (see-PAP). It can take some time to adjust to wearing the mask but most people feel more rested and alert with the start of treatment. Heart function also may improve.



Treatment may also include weight loss if a person is overweight. Surgery can be used as a treatment for some people with sleep apnea but it is not often a choice for people with heart failure.

There is no cure for sleep apnea but it can be treated with very good results.

- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**