Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux
de la Montérégie-Ouest



Sleep apnea

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

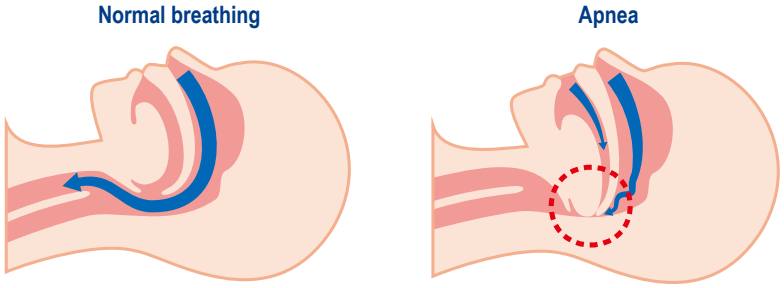
Is your doctor concerned you might have sleep apnea? This fact sheet will help you better understand what sleep apnea is, its consequences, and what to do about it.

What is sleep apnea?

Sleep apnea is a condition where **breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep**. These interruptions, called “apneas,” last about 10 to 30 seconds. They can happen several times during the night.

During apneas, the throat partially or completely closes.

To interrupt an apnea, the body reacts by briefly waking up (called microarousals). During microarousals, breathing returns to normal. Most of the time, these microarousals are so short that you do not notice them.



What are the symptoms?

During the night:

- Restless sleep
- Snoring
- Pauses in breathing
- Noisy breathing at the end of apneas
- Frequent urination

During the day:

- Headaches when you wake up
- Feeling sleepy (drowsiness)
- Fatigue
- Concentration and memory problems
- Irritability

Useful resources

- Your family doctor or a health professional
- Government of Canada: Sleep apnea - Canada.ca

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Risk factors

A risk factor increases the chances of developing a health problem.

The main risk factors for sleep apnea:

- Being male
- Menopause
- Overweight or obesity
- Older age
- Smoking
- Use of alcohol or sleeping pills
- Family history
- Narrow airways
- Chronic nasal congestion

Health consequences

Apnea affects your sleep and rest. You are at risk of falling asleep during the day. This lack of sleep can lead to:

- Traffic or workplace accidents
- Isolation
- Loss of productivity
- Work absenteeism

Untreated sleep apnea can lead to serious long-term health problems:

- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Heart attack
- Depression
- Decreased sex drive

What to do?

After seeing a doctor, you will be given a referral to a sleep laboratory.

- An **overnight test** is needed to diagnose sleep apnea.
- If the diagnosis is confirmed, you will be offered appropriate treatment.

Certain lifestyle changes can also help reduce the symptoms and risks:

- Weight loss
- Exercise
- Quitting smoking
- A regular sleep schedule
- Avoiding alcohol and sleeping pills
- Side sleeping

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