



Obstructive Sleep Apnea: What Is It?

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a potentially serious sleep disorder in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts during sleep.

Signs and symptoms

You or a loved one may be suffering from OSA if symptoms include:

- Excessive daytime sleepiness (hypersomnia)
- Loud snoring
- Observed episodes of breathing cessation during sleep
- Abrupt awakenings accompanied by shortness of breath
- Awakening with a dry mouth or sore throat

- Morning headache
- Difficulty staying asleep (insomnia)
- Difficult-to-control high blood pressure

Cause

OSA occurs when the muscles in the back of your throat relax too much to allow normal breathing, which can lower oxygen levels in your blood. Your brain briefly wakes you from sleep so you can reopen your airway. These disruptions make you feel sleepy during the day, but many sufferers are never aware of the brief periods of wakefulness.

(over)

Risk factors

Anyone can develop OSA, but certain factors put some people at increased risk, including:

- Being overweight
- Having a larger neck
- High blood pressure (hypertension)
- A narrowed airway
- Chronic nasal congestion
- Diabetes
- Being male
- Being black, Hispanic, or a Pacific Islander
- Advanced age
- Being postmenopausal
- A family history of sleep apnea
- Use of alcohol, sedatives, or tranquilizers
- Smoking

Complications

Treating OSA is important. If left untreated, complications may include:

- **Cardiovascular problems.** Many people with OSA develop hypertension, which raises the risk of heart failure and stroke, and are more likely to develop abnormal heart rhythms like atrial fibrillation.

If there's underlying heart disease, these repeated episodes of low blood oxygen (hypoxia or hypoxemia) could lead to sudden death from a cardiac event.

- **Daytime fatigue.** OSA sufferers may have difficulty concentrating or find themselves falling asleep at work, while watching TV, or even when driving. Children and young people with OSA may do poorly in school, have reduced mental development, or have behavioral problems.
- **Complications with medications and surgery.** OSA is also a concern with certain medications and general anesthesia.
- **Eye problems.** Some research has found a connection between OSA and eye conditions, such as glaucoma and optic nerve swelling (papilledema).
- **Sleep-deprived partners.** Loud snoring can keep those around you from getting good rest and may eventually disrupt relationships.

People with untreated OSA may complain of memory problems, morning headaches, mood swings or feelings of depression, and a need to urinate frequently at night.

If you have questions about OSA, talk to your doctor.



bcbswny.com

BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York is a Medicare Advantage plan with a Medicare contract and enrollment depends on contract renewal. A division of HealthNow New York Inc., an independent licensee of the BlueCross BlueShield Association.

BlueCross BlueShield of Western New York complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1-800-329-2792 (TTY 711).

注意:如果您使用繁體中文,您可以免費獲得語言援助服務。請致電 1-800-329-2792 (TTY 711)。