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ASK THE EXPERT



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What is sleep apnea?

Sleep related problems affect many Americans. The most commonly known disorder, obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) affects at least 40 million people in the United States. It is characterized by snoring, holding your breath during sleep and cessation of airflow into the lungs for greater than 10 seconds. Most people experience daytime fatigue, falling asleep while driving or watching television, and morning headaches. One never feels truly rested. Many but not all people with OSA are overweight.

WHY IS IT DANGEROUS?

If undiagnosed and untreated there is a 5-fold increase in automobile accidents in those affected with the condition.

In addition, people with sleep apnea have an increased incidence of cardiac problems such as irregular heartbeats, hypertension or high blood pressure, and increased risk of stroke. The irregular heartbeat can contribute to sudden death especially during sleep or in the early morning hours.

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT?

To make the definitive diagnosis, we put people through an overnight sleep test, which quantifies the number of obstructive events that occur per hour. The severity of the apneas correlates with an increased risk of those medical complications such as hypertension.

In addition to weight loss, there are a number of treatment options, which include CPAP, which is a mask that is placed over the nose during sleep. Think of it as a reverse vacuum cleaner. The device pumps air into the upper airway, which overcomes the resistance of the tissues of the nose, palate and tongue, thus overcoming the

apnea and obstruction.

Additional treatment options are available for those that cannot tolerate CPAP. These include oral appliances, which thrust the tongue forward during sleep, and a number of new procedures for upper airway corrective surgery.

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