

*Feeling*  
**Tired?**



*But You're  
Not Sure*  
**Why?**

Then there's something  
you should know about

**Sleep  
Apnea**

**ASA** AMERICAN SOCIETY  
OF ANESTHESIOLOGISTS

# Wake Up *to the* Effects of Sleep Apnea

## What Is It?

Obstructive sleep apnea is a condition that causes the soft tissue in the rear of the throat to narrow and repeatedly close during sleep. The brain responds to each of these “apnea events” by waking the person in order to resume breathing. Since apnea events can happen hundreds of times per night, sleep becomes broken and ineffective.

## Could I Have Obstructive Sleep Apnea?

Obstructive sleep apnea affects 18 million people and is more common among overweight males over age 40. But it has been known to affect otherwise healthy men, women and children of any age group. If you are frequently tired upon waking and throughout the day or if you have trouble staying asleep at night, ask yourself these questions:

- Have I been told that I snore or stop breathing during sleep?
- Do I wake up throughout the night or constantly turn from side to side?
- Have I been told that my legs or arms jerk while I’m sleeping?
- Do I make abrupt snorting noises during sleep?
- Do I feel tired or fall asleep during the day?

If you answered “yes” to any or all of these questions, you could have sleep apnea, and it is important that you discuss such symptoms with your doctor.

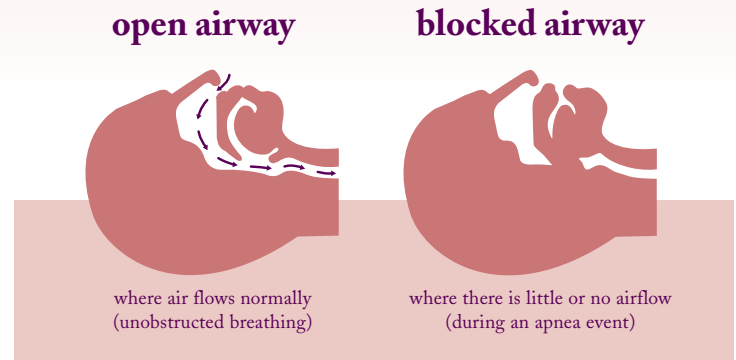
## What Do I Do About It?

The greatest danger from obstructive sleep apnea is that it is so often undiagnosed. Sleep apnea can be treated in a variety of ways – but you must make your health care providers aware if you suffer from any of the symptoms described above. If undiagnosed, sleep apnea can cause high blood pressure, cardiac disease, impotency, behavior and thinking problems, and may be responsible for many job-related injuries. It is estimated that people with sleep apnea are 10 times more likely to die in a car accident than someone without sleep apnea.

## Dangers During Surgery

Perhaps more so than any other health care provider, anesthesiologists need to be especially vigilant about obstructive sleep apnea. During general anesthesia (that is, when the patient is

*An alarming number of Americans are sleepwalking through a physical condition that can lead to serious health problems if undetected. An estimated 18 million Americans are thought to have clinically significant obstructive sleep apnea, and, even more alarming, approximately 16 million of those people remain undiagnosed.*



completely unconscious), the patient’s airway can collapse. This is normal but must be carefully monitored by the anesthesiologist. Because of the dangers to even a normal airway during general anesthesia, it is of the utmost importance that the anesthesiologist be aware of the already restricted airway of the person with sleep apnea.

## Talk to Your Doctor!

If you do have obstructive sleep apnea and you are in need of surgery, your chances of complications are remote — *but please discuss your symptoms with your doctor before the surgery!* If your physician suspects that you have sleep apnea, precautions can be taken before, during and after your surgery, and this will help to minimize the possibility of complications from sleep apnea that might occur during anesthesia and surgery.

## Tired of Being Tired?

Obstructive sleep apnea is becoming more and more common, but its threat can be greatly diminished through education and awareness. If you think you have sleep apnea, you may undergo a sleep study to verify the existence of the condition. If you do have sleep apnea, a wide variety of treatment options are available that will help you get back *off* your feet, into bed and comfortably on your way to a good night’s sleep!

*For more information about sleep apnea and anesthesia safety, visit <[www.AnesthesiaSafety.info](http://www.AnesthesiaSafety.info)>*