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## Really? The Claim: Sleep Apnea Causes Sexual Problems

By Anahad O'Connor October 10, 2011 1:47 pm

### THE FACTS

Sleep apnea causes disrupted breathing in the middle of the night for more than 12 million Americans. Fatigue, high blood pressure and weight gain are some of its more familiar symptoms.

But a growing body of research has also found that sleep apnea can be a drain on intimacy, causing erectile dysfunction in men and loss of libido in women.

Scientists suspect this may have to do with sex hormones like testosterone, which rise with sleep and fall when there is a lack of it. Because it causes intermittent waking and chronic sleep deprivation, apnea may directly drive down levels of these hormones, causing sexual dysfunction.

In the most recent study, published last month in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, scientists compared 80 women with obstructive sleep apnea between the ages of 28 and 64 with 240 women without the condition. They found that the apnea patients had significantly higher rates of sexual dysfunction. Their findings echoed those of earlier studies on women and apnea.

In a study in 2009, researchers looked for signs of sexual problems in 401 men who showed up at a clinic for suspected sleep apnea. Of those who received the diagnosis, about 70 percent also had erectile dysfunction, compared with 34 percent in those without sleep apnea.

But on the bright side, treatment can make a difference. Patients who undergo surgery to correct facial abnormalities that contribute to apnea see improvements in intimacy, and those who start using masks at night that administer continuous positive airway pressure also report benefits in their sexual relationships.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

Sleep apnea can raise the risk of sexual dysfunction.