



## When Is Your Snoring OK?

### *What to look out for.*

Sleep Apnea, Snoring

Nearly half of all American adults—or about 90 million people—are regular snorers. It is frustrating to bedmates and the source of marital tension. Although it's common, it is not normal: All snoring implies some degree of turbulent airflow during sleep due to an obstruction in the breathing pathways. Sometimes, this can be caused by a cold or allergies. But other times, it is a signal of a health issue known as **obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)**.

OSA is a sleep disorder where breathing during sleep is interrupted by an obstruction that jolts a person awake in order to start breathing again. A person's age, weight, and certain lifestyle habits can help determine whether snoring is related to OSA. Also, even if a snorer doesn't have OSA currently, small changes such as weight gain over time can increase the risk of developing it.

What is the biggest sign that a person's snoring is caused by OSA? The sound. Snorers with OSA commonly make loud, ragged breathing sounds, along with choking noises and moments of breathlessness. Certainly, a stuffy nose or congestion due to a cold can contribute to a few nights of these symptoms, but with OSA the nighttime noise is constant.

Certain variables make OSA more likely to occur in some people than others. People who are overweight, male, and middle aged are all at higher risk. Those who smoke, drink alcohol, or take certain medications are also more prone to snoring. Due to

frequent nighttime disruptions, people with OSA may also experience sleepiness throughout the day, even if they follow a regular sleep schedule.

If you're unsure whether you or your partner has OSA, it's best not to ignore the situation, as OSA is an insidiously progressive condition that may continue to worsen without intervention. Talk with a medical professional who can assess what's going on and offer appropriate treatment options if, in fact, the snoring is related to a serious health condition like OSA.