

Sleep Apnea~Facts Sheet

What is Sleep Apnea? Sleep Apnea is a potentially serious sleep disorder in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts. You may have sleep apnea if you snore loudly and you feel tired even after a full night's sleep. Left untreated, sleep apnea can have serious and life-shortening consequences: high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, automobile accidents caused by falling asleep at the wheel, diabetes, depression, and other ailments. There are three types of sleep apnea-Obstructive, Central and Mixed. Obstructive sleep apnea is caused by a blockage of the airway, usually when the soft tissue in the rear of the throat collapses and closes during sleep. In central sleep apnea, the airway is not blocked but the brain fails to signal the muscles to breathe. Mixed sleep apnea, as the name implies, is a combination of the two. With each apnea event, the brain rouses the sleeper, usually only partially, to signal breathing to resume. As a result, the patient's sleep is extremely fragmented and of poor quality.

How prevalent is it? Sleep apnea is very common, as common as type 2 diabetes. It affects more than 18 million Americans, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

Risk factors: Obstructive sleep apnea=Excess weight-Fat deposits around your upper airway may obstruct your breathing. However, not everyone who has sleep apnea is overweight. Neck circumference-People with a thicker neck may have a narrower airway. A narrowed airway-You may have inherited a naturally narrow throat. Or, your tonsils or adenoids may become enlarged, which can block your airway. Being male-Men are twice as likely to have sleep apnea. Being older-Sleep apnea occurs significantly more often in adults older than 60. Family history-If you have family members with sleep apnea, you may be at increased risk. Use of alcohol, sedatives or tranquilizers-These substances relax the muscles in your throat. Smoking-Smokers are three times more likely to have obstructive sleep apnea than are people who've never smoked. Nasal congestion-If you have difficulty breathing through your nose — whether it's from an anatomical problem or allergies — you're more likely to develop obstructive sleep apnea. Central sleep apnea=Being male-Males are more likely to develop central sleep apnea. Being older. People older than 65 years of age have a higher risk of having central sleep apnea, especially if they also have other risk factors. Heart disorders-People with atrial fibrillation or congestive heart failure are more at risk of central sleep apnea. Stroke or brain tumor-These conditions can impair the brain's ability to regulate breathing.

When to see a doctor:

Consult a medical professional if you experience, or if your partner notices, the following:

- ◆ Snoring loud enough to disturb the sleep of others or yourself
- ◆ Shortness of breath that awakens you from sleep
- ◆ Intermittent pauses in your breathing during sleep
- ◆ Excessive daytime drowsiness, which may cause you to fall asleep while you're working, watching television or even driving

For more information visit: www.sleepapnea.org, www.sleepfoundation.org, www.mayoclinic.com

National Indian Women's Health Resource Center

228 South Muskogee Ave., Tahlequah, OK 74464 Phone-918-456-6094 Fax-918-456-8128

Vision: American Indian and Alaska Native women and families living a healthy, balanced life.



Mission: To empower American Indian and Alaska Native women and families to build happy, healthy communities.