



What is Sleep Apnoea?

Sleep Apnoea is a serious disorder that occurs when the airway from the mouth to the lungs collapses during sleep.

A common condition that affects 5% of adults (but is rarer among children), sufferers of sleep apnoea stop breathing for 10 seconds or more during sleep¹. The sleeper's brain then briefly wakes up in order to resume breathing, resulting in poor-quality and disjointed sleep.

There are two types of sleep apnoea – obstructive sleep apnoea and central sleep apnoea:

- + **Obstructive apnoea** is the more common type among sufferers and occurs when muscles in the walls of an individual's throat relax to the point where the airway collapses and prevents air from flowing into their nose and mouth
- + **Central apnoea** occurs when breathing interruptions during sleep are caused by issues with brain mechanisms that control breathing

Symptoms of Sleep Apnoea

Sufferers of sleep apnoea are not usually aware of waking up during the night – however, indications of the disorder may include:

- + Morning headaches
- + Excessive daytime fatigue
- + Personality changes and Depression
- + Loss of memory and concentration
- + Excessive snoring or choking during sleep
- + Insomnia
- + Awakening with a dry mouth or sore throat

What are the implications of Sleep Apnoea on oral health?

While snoring is a major indicator of sleep apnoea, not all symptoms are as obvious – and audible. A dentist can detect symptoms of sleep apnoea through a candid conversation with a patient (in conjunction with a complete dental exam)

about the patient's recent pains or discomforts. For example, a dentist may suspect a patient suffers from sleep apnoea if the patient complains about lethargy, morning headaches or dry mouth².

Dry mouth itself can have negative effects on the patient's quality of life, affecting nutrition and dietary habits, speech, taste, difficulty with a dental prosthesis such as a denture, and also increases susceptibility to dental cavities and tooth decay. If you are over 55 years and suffer from dry mouth the ADA recommends you should maintain a good oral health regime by brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste, flossing regularly and having regular dental checkups.

¹ *Sleep Disorders Australia (2007) Sleep Apnea fact sheet. Adelaide, South Australia.*

² *Academy of General Dentistry (2009) A Dentist's Role in Sleep Apnea [Press Release]. Retrieved from www.knowyourteeth.com/newsroom*

What is the dentist's role in detecting sleep apnoea?

Dentists can often be the first health care professional to become aware of this condition since they are able to detect less evident symptoms of sleep apnoea by observing a patient's mouth. However, the ADA recommends a diagnosis from a sleep medicine specialist is sought before any treatment can be administered by a dentist.

The use of oral appliances is a scientifically proven and effective method in the treatment of snoring and moderate sleep apnoea. Dental appliances can help position the jaw and tongue to increase the volume of air flow and prevent soft tissues of the mouth from collapsing. While there may be minor side effects such as discomfort and extra salivation, an oral health appliance (with monitoring by a dentist) can be an effective treatment of sleep apnoea.