

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Snoring can damage heart, say docs

Risha Chittlangia | TNN

New Delhi: Does your loud snoring disturb others at home? Don't just ignore it as a sign of a good night's sleep. Doctors say snoring is a serious medical condition and in some cases can even lead to high blood pressure, diabetes and heart problems. In fact, snoring is also a sign of serious sleep apnea.

Not just adults, even children are found to snore. But in their case the reasons are different and can be managed with age. "In children snoring is often due to tonsillitis, as it blocks the airway behind the tongue or due to obesity. These children often face difficulty in breathing while sleeping and have disturbed sleep. Obesity is an important reason in both children and adults," said Dr SK Sharma, head of department, medicine, and in charge of sleep medicine clinic at AIIMS.

Snoring occurs when the airway gets obstructed. And this could be due to excess fat around the neck, which forces the muscles to narrow down or due to infection. "We hear the sound of snoring as the airway gets narrow, thereby increasing the airflow in the respiratory system through the small opening. The air, before reaching the lungs, vibrates the soft tissues and as a result we produce the loud sounds," said Dr Vikram Sarbhai, senior consultant and in charge of sleep medicine, Max healthcare.

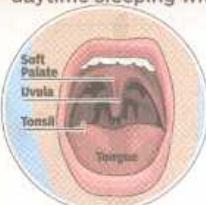
The obstruction of airway can be in the nostrils or behind the tongue. The nostril obstruction can be treated with a special nose strip avail-

Why Do We snore

It is a loud sound produced during sleep by the vibration of respiratory structures when the airways get obstructed because of irregular flow of air. Studies have shown that at least 25% men and 9% women above the age of 40 suffer from snoring problem in the US. In India, doctors say the figures are even higher



What is sleep apnea: It is the complete stoppage of breathing while sleep that results in fragmented sleep patterns. It is abnormal if this lasts for more than 10 seconds. It may result in daytime sleeping without the patient even realizing it



The dangers

Snores, if ignored, can lead to serious medical conditions. Due to snores, oxygen supply to the body is affected. The body comes under extreme stress and undergoes metabolic changes. It may affect lining of the heart arteries and result in high BP, heart disease, diabetes and, in extreme cases, strokes

Causes

- Throat weakness
- Misaligned jaw
- Obesity (especially fat gathering in and around the throat)
- Obstruction in the nasal passageway
- Tonsillitis in children

Treatment

- A detailed evaluation by a sleep therapy expert can help in diagnosing problem
- Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP): In this, a patient has to wear a pressurized mask over the nose while sleeping. The mask is attached to a small pump that forces air through the airway to keep it open
- Lifestyle changes and weight therapy



able in the market that helps in opening the nasal blockages. But if it is due to ob-

struction in the throat, then it is important to see an expert, as it could lead to serious med-

ical conditions. "A lot of people don't consider it a serious problem. If

a person snores then he/she should get themselves screened at a sleep medicine clinic, as in the long run it could result in high blood pressure, diabetes and heart problems. Due to decrease in oxygen supply, the body gets stressed and produces certain chemicals and hormones that can bring about changes in the body's metabolism," said Dr Manvir Bhatia, chairman of sleep clinic, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.

Sleep Apnea is a dangerous consequence of ignoring a snoring problem. In this, patients don't breathe for more than 10 seconds due to obstructed airway. As a result, they have disturbed sleep at night and make up for it by sleeping in the day. Experts say this can be dangerous as people can suddenly fall asleep while driving. "Sleep apnea should be taken seriously. Such people have to be kept on continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine. In such cases, the throat muscles collapse, closing the airway completely. This can be dangerous. This machine acts like a splint and keeps the airway open with air pressure. A person diagnosed with sleep apnea has to sleep wearing a mask hooked to a machine," said Dr R S Chatterji, head of department, pulmonology and sleep clinic, Rockland hospital.

Doctors say it is important to diagnose this problem in the initial stages as it can be cured. "The biggest problem with snoring is that it is the commonest problem, yet under-diagnosed and unrecognized," said Dr Sarbhai.

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