

HEALTHY LIVING

Breathing disorders can steal sleep – and life

Q: I'm sleepy during the day. My wife was always bothered by my snoring, but lately she's noticed I periodically stop breathing throughout the night. Is this connected to my daytime sleepiness?

A: "Yes, very likely. Frequent disruption of breathing during sleep accompanied by daytime drowsiness is a telltale sign of a nighttime disorder known as sleep apnea," says Walid Baaklini, M.D., a board-certified Pulmonologist also specializing in Sleep Medicine at Kelsey-Seybold's Spring Medical and Diagnostic Center and the new Kelsey-Seybold Clinic at The Vintage in northwest Houston. "Left untreated, it can be life-threatening, increasing the risk of heart attack, stroke and even car accidents."

Although episodes of gasping for air might occur hundreds of times throughout the night, 90 percent of sleep apnea sufferers don't know they have it. Usually, it is the bed partner who first notices the nightly struggle for breath.

There are different types of sleep apnea, but the most common is caused by a collapse of tissue in the area around the back of the tongue, soft palate and throat, impeding the upper airway passage.

"It's vital that a proper medical evaluation be made to confirm



WALID
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the cause and consider treatment options," says Dr. Baaklini, who sees more than 30 sleep apnea patients per week.

Dr. Baaklini may prescribe a continuous positive airway pressure device. "The CPAP is a machine pumping a gentle airflow at a constant pressure to support the upper respiratory system," Dr. Baaklini says. "It is connected via a hose and mask to the patient for use during sleep."

Sleep apnea will not go away without treatment and may worsen over time.

"It's important to discuss sleep problems with your health care provider and seek help from a sleep specialist if needed," Dr. Baaklini emphasizes.

Call 713-442-7587 to schedule an appointment or to find a physician at Kelsey-Seybold Clinic.

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