
Snoring

Summary

- Snoring is noisy breathing through the mouth or nose due to vibrating the soft tissues of a narrowed throat.
 - Treating nasal stuffiness, losing weight and cutting down on drinking can reduce the severity of snoring.
 - A mouthguard has been shown to be effective if fitted properly.
 - Surgical options include reshaping the soft palate or treating it with laser therapy, but these may not be successful.
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It's estimated that around 20 per cent of the population snores at night. Snoring isn't physically harmful to the person who snores, but it is highly irritating to anyone kept awake by the noise. More men snore than women, with around one quarter of males prone to snoring. Snoring may also be a symptom of significant sleep-disordered breathing or obstructive sleep apnoea.

During sleep, the muscles of the soft palate and uvula (the structures found in the back of the throat) tend to relax and vibrate when the person breathes. This happens both when breathing through the nose or the open mouth. This relaxed tissue vibrates as air moves back and forth across it, making the characteristic noise.

Sleep deprivation and fatigue

Snoring isn't harmful and can be left untreated with no ill effects, although sometimes a person can snore so loudly that they constantly wake themselves during the night and this can lead to long-term sleep deprivation and fatigue. Snoring has also been known to put strain on a marriage, since the spouse is regularly denied a good night's sleep and may move to another room.

Snoring and obstructive sleep apnoea

In some cases, snoring is part of obstructive sleep apnoea. This occurs when the walls of the throat come together during sleep and block the airway between the voice box and the back of the nose. After a few seconds, the sleeper makes a strong breathing effort and restarts breathing. A person with this disorder might wake up hundreds of times every night. Treatments are available.

The typical snorer

Snoring is more likely when you have a cold, sinusitis or some other reason for a stuffy nose. Snoring is more common when you sleep on your back. Habitual night-time snorers, however, tend to share certain characteristics. The typical snorer is:

- Male
- Aged between 30 and 65 years
- Overweight
- May have high blood pressure
- May be told that snoring is worse with alcohol and with a cold.

Simple remedies for snoring

Losing weight and cutting back on alcohol tends to reduce the severity of snoring, if not cure it altogether. Other tips include:

- Avoid sleeping tablets.
- Sleep on your side rather than your back.
- Treat nasal congestion.
- Make sure the air in the bedroom is neither too dry nor too humid.
- Avoid alcohol in the hours before bedtime.

Oral appliance or mandibular advancement splint

A mandibular advancement splint (MAS) is a dental therapy device similar to a mouth guard, which if fitted properly, can reduce snoring. Other remedies, such as chin straps, anti-snoring pillows or 'drops' under the tongue, are not useful.

Surgery is not a permanent cure

Surgery might be considered in extreme cases of snoring. However, there is always a chance that surgery might only work for a short time or not at all. Surgery is not a permanent cure.

The techniques to choose from include:

- **Uvulopalatopharyngoplasty (UPPP)** – the tonsils are taken out and the soft palate reshaped. This operation is performed under anaesthetic and requires a hospital stay.
- **Laser uvulopalatopharyngoplasty (laser treatment)** – a laser beam is used to wound the palate. When the tissue heals, it is usually stiffer because of scarring. The patient can go home straight after treatment. This method is generally not successful and so is discouraged by experts.
- **Somnoplasty** – is piecemeal burning of the soft palate. This method is also now discouraged by experts.

All techniques are painful for at least 10 days.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Sleep disorder clinic

Things to remember

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