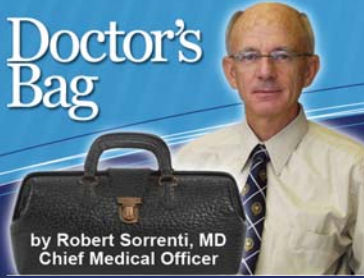


## Doctor's Bag



by Robert Sorrenti, MD  
Chief Medical Officer

### SELF MANAGEMENT OF MILD SLEEP APNEA

If you suspect you have sleep apnea, schedule an appointment with your personal physician. He or she will help you determine the level of treatment you need.

In the meantime, there are several things you can do on your own to manage mild sleep apnea (5 or fewer episodes per hour).

Here's the list from WebMD:

**Lose weight.** Many people who have sleep apnea are overweight. Losing weight can reduce the number of times per hour that you stop breathing or that the airflow to your lungs is reduced.

**Limit the use of alcohol and medicine.** Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol or taking certain medicines before sleep – especially sleeping pills or sedatives – may make symptoms worse. Also, taking Viagra shortly before sleeping may make sleep apnea worse.

**Get plenty of sleep.** Sleep apnea episodes may be more frequent when you have not had enough sleep.

**Sleep on your side.** Changing your sleeping position can help eliminate mild sleep apnea. Avoid sleeping on your back. You can also try using a cervical pillow which is designed to keep your head in a position that reduces incidents of sleep apnea.

**Quit smoking.** Smoking can increase the swelling in the upper airway which may worsen both snoring and apnea.

## HLInfo YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

### Sleep Apnea A Common Disorder That Can Be Serious

Sleep apnea is a common but serious sleep disorder that causes breathing to stop or become very shallow. Each pause in breathing typically lasts 10 to 20 seconds or more. The pauses can occur 20 to 30 times or more each hour. Because individuals with sleep apnea are sleeping, often times the condition is discovered by a bed partner.

The most common form of sleep apnea is obstructive sleep apnea. Individuals with this condition are unable to move enough air through their mouth and nose into their lungs. This can cause the amount of oxygen in the blood to drop. Normal breaths resume with a snort or choking sound. People with sleep apnea often snore loudly but not everyone who snores has sleep apnea.

#### Why Is Sleep Apnea a Problem?

When a person's sleep is interrupted throughout the night, he or she becomes drowsy during the day. People with sleep apnea may experience poor performance in everyday activities. Children and adolescents are at higher risk for academic underachievement. Children and adults alike are more prone to accidents.

Sleep apnea has also been associated with serious health problems such as hypertension, stroke, heart failure, irregular heart beats and heart attacks.

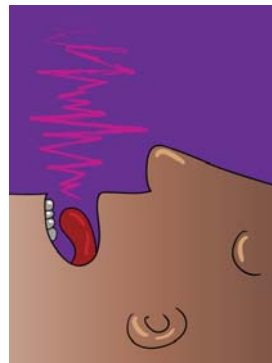
#### It is Important to Get Treatment for Sleep Apnea.

Treatment for sleep apnea can be in the form of behavioral modifications such as losing weight, avoiding alcohol and cigarettes and changing sleep positions.

Specially designed dental appliances can also help keep the airways open.

For more serious cases, doctors may recommend the use of a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) device. This type of treatment involves wearing a mask hooked up to a machine that delivers a continuous flow of air into the nostrils.

In some cases, surgery may be needed to correct the problem.



## DidUKnow?

According to the American Association for Respiratory Care:

- Sleep apnea affects up to 18 million Americans.
- People with sleep apnea can stop breathing as many as 30 times or more each night.
- Men in general suffer from sleep apnea more than women.
- Children can also have sleep apnea.
- Studies have linked sleep apnea to high blood pressure, heart attack and stroke.
- Risk factors for sleep apnea include being overweight and having a large neck.
- Losing even 10% of body weight can help reduce the number of times a person with sleep apnea stops breathing during sleep.
- African Americans, Pacific Islanders and Mexican-Americans may be at increased risk for sleep apnea.
- Smoking and alcohol use increase the risk of sleep apnea.

#### Newsletter Information Sources

YourLungHealth.org, "Sleep Apnea Facts," 2009 American Association of Respiratory Care

MedlinePlus, a service of the U.S. Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health, "Sleep Apnea," <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sleepapnea.html>

WebMD, "Sleep Apnea Health Center," <http://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/sleep-apnea/sleep-apnea>

### HEALTHLINK IS MOVING TO DOWNTOWN ST. LOUIS AS OF NOVEMBER 9, 2009

All toll-free telephone numbers, including Customer Service and Medical Management, will remain the same and will be working during the move.

[www.healthlink.com](http://www.healthlink.com) and the State of Illinois Member Access portal will be down during the move, from noon November 6 until 6:00 a.m. November 9.