

Young children with sleep apnea may face learning difficulties: study

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(HealthDay)—Sleep apnea in young children may affect youngsters'

attention, memory and language development, a new study suggests.

The researchers added that as sleep apnea worsens, the risk of these problems also may increase.

"Although evidence suggesting the presence of cognitive deficits in [children](#) with sleep apnea has been around for quite some time, the relatively small groups studied made it difficult to demonstrate a strong relationship between increasing cognitive issues and increasing sleep apnea severity," said Dr. Leila Gozal, from the University of Chicago.

Sleep apnea causes people to experience repetitive pauses in breathing while they sleep. This causes oxygen levels to drop temporarily, according to the U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

While the new study with children did not prove cause-and-effect, previous research has shown that sleep apnea in adults is associated with trouble concentrating, memory issues, poor decision-making, depression and stress.

The new study involved almost 1,400 public schoolchildren with sleep apnea. The kids ranged in age from 5 to 7. Some, but not all, of the children snored.

The researchers divided the children into four groups based on the severity of their sleep apnea.

The kids participated in an overnight sleep study and answered detailed questions about their sleep. The children also completed tests to measure certain aspects of brain function, including language and decision-making skills.

After comparing the results in each group, the researchers found that

even mild problems such as snoring had a negative effect on children's thinking abilities, the researchers reported in a news release from the American Thoracic Society.

Gozal said the findings suggest that the development of simple brain function tests that could be used along with current clinical evaluation of children with habitual snoring might help guide the treatment of children with [sleep apnea](#).

The findings were to be presented Monday at the American Thoracic Society's annual conference, in San Francisco. Findings presented at meetings are typically seen as preliminary until they've been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: The U.S. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute provides more information on [sleep apnea](#).

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