

The causes and complications of snoring

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Nearly half of adults habitually snore when they sleep.

For some, it's not a problem. For others, it may affect the quality of their bed partner's rest. It can also be associated with sleep apnea, a condition affecting a person's ability to breathe and the quality of their sleep.

"It could be suggestive of something more going on," said Dr. Neerav Goyal, director of head and [neck surgery](#) at Penn State Health.

Snoring is caused by relaxed throat or nasal tissue that vibrates when it collapses while the body is horizontal during shut-eye.

"A lot of it has to do with how air flows through your nose and mouth," Goyal said. "When we sleep, muscle tone lapses and tissues vibrate much as a reed does when you play a musical instrument."

Those who sleep on their back are more prone to snoring than side sleepers because of how gravity collapses tissues and muscles in the airway. Sometimes sleeping propped up with a wedge pillow or in a recliner instead of horizontally can help lessen snoring.

For some, snoring is caused by a genetic anatomic obstruction such as a deviated septum, large tonsils, a floppy soft palate or a large neck circumference.

People with disorders such as [cerebral palsy](#) or [degenerative diseases](#) may be prone to snoring, because they have less muscle tone as-is. Medications (such as sedatives) and alcohol can also decrease muscle tone.

Those who are overweight or obese with a body-mass index higher than 25 may also be at risk, because they may have extra tissue and weight around the airway.

Others only snore, on occasion, when they have allergies or a cold.

Snoring becomes a problem when it interferes with someone's or their bed partner's ability to get enough [restful sleep](#). In some cases, snoring is associated with sleep apnea, where a sleeping person stops breathing,

oxygen levels drop and he or she awakens gasping for air, preventing a restful night of sleep.

"If you snore and feel you are getting [poor quality sleep](#), it may be a good idea to see your [family doctor](#) about an evaluation for sleep apnea," Goyal said.

For people with diagnosed sleep apnea, treatments and surgeries can be covered by insurance, because untreated [sleep apnea](#) can cause the lungs and heart to work overtime.

Sleep apnea can also contribute to other life-threatening conditions, such as [high blood pressure](#), heart disease, stroke and falling asleep at the wheel.

If an obstruction is in the nasal area, treatments may include over-the-counter Breathe Right strips that pull out the sides of the nose for improved air flow or surgical repair of a deviated septum.

When snoring is caused by an obstruction in the mouth or throat, dental appliances or surgical repair of the soft palate may help.

Goyal said lifestyle changes like losing the extra pounds "will definitely have a big impact."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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