

Study links sleep apnea treatment and happier, healthier relationships

May 30 2024



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A new study to be presented at the SLEEP 2024 annual meeting demonstrates that when individuals with obstructive sleep apnea use their positive airway pressure machine more regularly, it benefits their relationship with their partner.

Results show that greater adherence to PAP therapy was associated with

higher levels of relationship satisfaction and lower levels of relationship conflict. Higher sleep efficiency among patients also was associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction as reported by both the patient and their [partner](#).

"Recognizing that sleep and sleep disorders have an impact on the quality of a relationship could be a powerful motivator for those affected with sleep apnea to adhere to [treatment](#)," said lead author Wendy Troxel, who is a senior behavioral scientist with RAND and licensed [clinical psychologist](#) and adjunct professor at the University of Utah, where the study was conducted.

"We developed a couples-based treatment called 'We-PAP' in recognition of the fact that couples' sleep is a shared experience and to help patients and partners overcome challenges to adhering PAP together."

According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, nearly 30 million adults in the U.S. have [obstructive sleep apnea](#), a chronic disease that involves the repeated collapse of the upper airway during sleep. Snoring is one of the most recognizable symptoms of sleep apnea and is often a nuisance to bed partners.

A common treatment for sleep apnea is PAP therapy, which uses mild levels of air pressure, provided through a mask, to keep the throat open during sleep.

The study involved 36 couples comprising patients initiating PAP treatment for sleep apnea and their partners. Objective PAP therapy adherence data were recorded over three months. Sleep duration and efficiency were estimated using actigraphy. Relationship satisfaction and conflict were self-reported.

Troxel noted that it is essential to consider the importance of sleep when evaluating [relationship](#) status.

"No one is at their best when they aren't sleeping," Troxel said. "In an age where we see couples going through 'sleep divorces,' and roughly 50% of marriages end in actual divorce, recognizing how healthy sleep can contribute to healthy relationships is imperative."

The research abstract was published recently in an [online supplement](#) of the journal *Sleep* and will be presented Wednesday, June 5, during [SLEEP 2024 in Houston](#).

More information: Wendy Troxel et al, 0569 Breathing Easy Together: How Positive Airway Pressure Adherence Benefits Both Patients and Partners, *Sleep* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/sleep/zsac067.0569](https://doi.org/10.1093/sleep/zsac067.0569)

Provided by American Academy of Sleep Medicine

Citation: Study links sleep apnea treatment and happier, healthier relationships (2024, May 30) retrieved 24 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-05-links-apnea-treatment-happier-healthier.html>

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