

Researchers identify a potential new risk for sleep apnea: Asthma

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Researchers at the University of Wisconsin have identified a potential new risk factor for obstructive sleep apnea: asthma. Using data from the National Institutes of Health (Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute)-funded Wisconsin Sleep Cohort Study, which has been following approximately 1,500 people since 1988, researchers found that patients who had asthma were 1.70 times (95% CI=1.15-2.51) more likely to develop sleep apnea after eight years.

"This is the first longitudinal study to suggest a causal relationship between [asthma](#) and [sleep apnea](#) diagnosed in laboratory-based sleep studies," said Mihaela Teodorescu, MD, MS, assistant professor of medicine at the university, who will present the research at ATS 2013. "Cross-sectional studies have shown that OSA is more common among those with asthma, but those studies weren't designed to address the direction of the relationship."

The connection between asthma and obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) was even stronger among participants who developed asthma as children. Childhood-onset asthma was associated with 2.34 times (95% CI=1.25-4.37) the likelihood of developing sleep apnea.

The researchers also found that the duration of asthma affected the chances of developing sleep apnea. For every five-year increase in asthma duration, the chances of developing OSA after eight years increased by 10 percent. Participants in the Wisconsin Sleep Cohort, who were all between the ages of 30 and 60 in 1988, complete in-laboratory polysomnography, clinical assessments and health history questionnaires every four years. For the asthma-OSA study, the researchers focused on 773 cohort enrollees who did not have OSA (apnea-hypopnea index

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