

## Understanding Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)

### What Is Sleep Apnea?

Apnea literally means "cessation of breath." If you have sleep apnea, your breath can become very shallow or you may even stop breathing while you are asleep. This state of not breathing can occur up to hundreds of times a night in some people.

### What Is Obstructive Sleep Apnea?

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) -- also called obstructive sleep apnea syndrome -- occurs when there are repeated episodes of complete or partial blockage of the upper airway during sleep. During a sleep apnea episode, the diaphragm and chest muscles work harder to open the obstructed airway and pull air into the lungs. Breathing usually resumes with a loud gasp, snort, or body jerk. These episodes can interfere with sound sleep. They can also reduce the flow of oxygen to vital organs and cause irregular heart rhythms.

### What Are the Symptoms of Obstructive Sleep Apnea?

Often the person with obstructive sleep apnea is not the first to recognize the signs. OSA is often first noticed by the bed partner or a person who observes the patient at rest. Many people who have OSA have no sleep complaints.

#### **The most common obstructive sleep apnea symptoms include:**

- Daytime sleepiness or fatigue
- Dry mouth or sore throat upon awakening
- Headaches in the morning
- Trouble concentrating, forgetfulness, depression, or irritability
- Night sweats
- Restlessness during sleep
- Sexual dysfunction
- Snoring
- Sudden awakenings with a sensation of gasping or choking
- Difficulty getting up in the mornings

#### **Symptoms of OSA in children may not be as obvious. They include:**

- Bedwetting
- Choking or drooling
- Excessive sweating at night
- Inward movement of the ribcage when inhaling

- Learning and behavioral disorders
- Poor school performance
- Sluggishness or sleepiness (often misinterpreted as laziness in the classroom)
- Snoring
- Teeth grinding
- Restlessness in bed
- Pauses or absence of breathing
- Unusual sleeping positions, such as sleeping on the hands and knees, or with the neck hyperextended

### Who Gets Obstructive Sleep Apnea?

According to Deloitte Access Economics, there were 775,000 Australians that had sleep apnea in 2010\*. It is estimated that more than half were overweight, and one in 25 middle-aged men and one in 50 middle-aged women have sleep apnea. If you are related to someone with sleep apnea, you are more likely to develop sleep apnea yourself.

Sleep apnea is more common in men than in women. It is also more likely to develop in African-Americans, Hispanics, and Pacific Islanders than in Caucasians. The likelihood of developing the condition increases with age. For women, the condition is more likely after menopause.

At our dental practice, you can take a sleep study in the comfort of your own bed at home, where you wear a portable sleep monitor called WatchPat\*\*. The device will give you an accurate reading if you are suspected to have OSA. Please contact our office for further details.

\*<http://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/pdfs/news/Reawakening%20Australia.pdf>

\*\*[http://www.itamar-medical.com/WatchPAT/Medical\\_Professional/WatchPAT\\_/Split\\_Night\\_Sleep\\_Studies.html](http://www.itamar-medical.com/WatchPAT/Medical_Professional/WatchPAT_/Split_Night_Sleep_Studies.html)

