

Wellness Articles

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Proposed publication date: Jan. 17, 2022
Content provided by: Alberta Health Services

What is snoring?

You snore when the flow of air from your mouth or nose to your lungs makes the tissues of your throat vibrate when you sleep. This can make a loud, raspy noise. Loud snoring can make it hard for you and your partner to get a good night's sleep.

You may not know that you snore. Your bed partner may notice the snoring and that you sleep with your mouth open. If snoring keeps you or your bed partner from getting a good night's sleep, one or both of you may feel tired during the day.

Snoring may point to other medical problems, such as obstructive sleep apnea. Sleep apnea can be a serious problem, because you stop breathing at times during sleep. So if you snore often, talk to your doctor about it.

Snoring is more common in men than in women.

What causes snoring?

When you sleep, the muscles in the back of the roof of your mouth (soft palate), tongue, and throat relax. If they relax too much, they narrow or block your airway. As you breathe, your soft palate and uvula vibrate and knock against the back of your throat. This causes the sounds you hear during snoring.

The tonsils and adenoids may also vibrate. The narrower the airway is, the more the tissue vibrates, and the louder the snoring is.

How is it treated?

You may be able to treat snoring by making changes in your lifestyle and in the way you prepare for sleep. For example:

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Quit smoking.
- Sleep on your side and not your back.
- Limit your use of alcohol and medicines before you go to bed.
- If a stuffy nose makes your snoring worse, use decongestants or nasal corticosteroid sprays to help you breathe.
- Try using devices that you attach to the outside of your nose to help with breathing while you sleep. These include nasal strips and nasal disks.
- When you sleep, use a device in your mouth that helps you breathe easier. This device pushes your tongue and jaw forward to improve airflow.

If these treatments do not work, you may be able to use a machine that helps you breathe while you sleep. This treatment is called continuous positive airway pressure, or CPAP (say "SEE-pap"). In rare cases, your doctor may suggest surgery to open your airway.