

Is Snoring the Only Problem

Focus on Seniors: Sawing logs at night? Better have it checked

DR. LEE SHELDON • FOR FLORIDA TODAY • May 30, 2010

People snore. It is a normal course of life, isn't it?

Of course, when people snore it becomes a problem; more for the bed partner than it is for the snorer himself or herself. Yes, I said herself because there are a lot of female snorers reading this article right now.

If snoring was the only problem, it would be considered to be a mere nuisance, and frankly, it was considered only a nuisance until recently.

But snoring actually can become a severe problem, one that increases the risk of life-threatening diseases.

Heart attack and stroke are the first that come to mind, and recently diabetes and hypercholesterolemia were added to the list. Yes, that means by simply stopping breathing when you are snoring, which is what sleep apnea is all about, it increases your risks of life-threatening events.

It happens simply. It happens slowly. It takes a while for a mild snorer to become a moderate snorer, to become a severe snorer, and finally develop sleep apnea.

What we find is most people don't know they have sleep apnea; 90 percent of those who have it don't know. I didn't.

The only way I found out was by doing a polysomnogram, a sleep study. I stopped breathing several times an hour, and as a result, the normal, relaxing sleep I thought I was getting actually was not occurring.

I don't have hypertension. I'm not obese. But I have sleep apnea, and therefore my risk of a heart attack is three times greater than that of a person who has hypertension, so it's not something to play with.

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We are fortunate in our county to have several competent sleep physicians. I have gotten to know them.

I have been in a sleep lab. I can see how comfortable a sleep lab is, and while you may think you won't sleep normally with a lot of wires attached to you, these sleep labs have become so comfortable it is like being in a hotel room.

If you have a doubt as to whether a test in a sleep lab is valid, let me tell you, it is. There are scientific studies to prove that.

The first thing to do is get a diagnosis. Go see a sleep physician. I have recommended lots of people to sleep physicians. The diagnosis is thorough.

Some are tested, and are reassured they don't have sleep apnea. If they have it, people do better as a result of treatment, continuous positive airway pressure through a mask or an oral appliance that moves the jaw forward and opens the airway.

They sound better. They don't snore anymore. And most importantly, they have an opportunity of reducing their risk of some life-threatening diseases.

What could be better than that?

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