Do You Have Sleep Apnea?
Talk to your dentist about snoring

In this brochure:
• What causes sleep apnea and who is affected by it
• How snoring relates to sleep apnea
• Ways your dentist can help you find relief

ADA Healthy Smile Tips
• Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
• Clean between your teeth daily.
• Eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks.
• See your dentist regularly for prevention and treatment of oral disease.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit MouthHealthy.org, the ADA’s website just for patients.

Left: When your airway is open, air can easily pass through as you breathe in and out. This allows you to breathe normally while you sleep.
Right: Your tongue/soft tissues block (or “obstruct”) your airway. The “snoring” sound is made when air tries to force its way through your blocked airway as you breathe in and out.

Why snoring happens
Snoring happens when the muscles in your mouth and/or throat relax and cause your tongue or other soft tissues to block your airway when you’re sleeping. This makes it harder to breathe normally on your own. As you breathe in and out, you make a “snoring” sound when air tries to force its way through your blocked airway.

Snoring Anatomy

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Snoring could be a sign you have sleep apnea

If you snore, then you probably already know that it can be an annoying distraction for your bedtime partner. But, snoring could also be a sign of a common sleep-related breathing disorder called sleep apnea (AP-nee-yuh). Sleep apnea occurs when your breathing slows down or stops one or more times when you are sleeping. This causes your brain to wake your body up so that you can take in a deeper breath and get the right amount of oxygen. You may also take shallow or short breaths while you sleep. This cycle can repeat dozens or even hundreds of times each night. Over time, this can put a lot of physical stress on your body and can lead to serious health problems if it’s not treated — like heart disease or diabetes.

Snoring doesn’t always equal sleep apnea

Snoring is a common sign of sleep apnea, but not everyone who snores has sleep apnea. The best way to know for certain is to talk to your physician or a doctor who specializes in sleep medicine.

Sleep apnea affects millions of people in the U.S.

These are some of the most common reasons why people may be affected:

- **Biology:** Enlarged tonsils, a large tongue, or a small or misaligned jaw can raise your risk of sleep apnea.
- **Being overweight/obese:** Extra weight puts more stress on your body and makes it even harder to breathe normally when you sleep.
- **Genetics/family history:** If other members of your family have sleep apnea, then you may be affected by it, too.
- **Men are more affected than women,** but it can also occur in women, especially after menopause.
- **Smoking and/or drinking alcohol** affect your tongue and tissues in your mouth and throat, making it harder to keep your airway open when you sleep.

Discuss treatment options with your dentist and physician

It’s important that you talk to your primary physician or a doctor who specializes in sleep medicine for an accurate diagnosis of sleep apnea. Then, your dentist can work with them to create a treatment plan that will help improve your quality of sleep and overall health. Treatment options range based on the severity of your sleep apnea.

Common treatment options:

**Changes in your lifestyle,** like losing weight and/or avoiding alcohol and tobacco may help to improve or lessen your symptoms.

**A continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) device** is worn like a mask while you sleep. It’s connected to a machine that uses a forced stream of air to keep your airway open and help you breathe easily.

**Pros:** It’s shown to be the most effective way to control sleep apnea.

**Cons:** The machine can be loud and the mask may feel bulky when trying to sleep, which may make it difficult to use regularly.

**Oral appliance therapy** is a custom-made oral appliance from your dentist that’s designed to help shift your jaw forward when you sleep. This jaw position prevents your airway from closing. The appliance fits just like a mouth guard for sports or a night guard for clenching or grinding.

**Pros:** More comfortable to wear and easier than a CPAP device to stick to every night.

**Cons:** May not be effective in treating severe cases of sleep apnea.

**Upper airway surgery** may be recommended if these treatment options are not successful for treating your sleep apnea.