

Treatment options for Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea needs to be treated with a multitude of approaches. It is the rare patient in whom just one treatment will cure the apnea. The different issues of apnea are related to each other. Sleep apnea is a cycle of events: the person is tired, does not exercise, the metabolism slows down, the person gains weight and the weight gain is the most significant cause of sleep apnea. It is essential to break the cycle.

The options broadly fall into two categories: medical treatment and surgical treatment. The goal of all the treatments is to try to reduce the narrowing and collapse of the airway.

Medical treatment

- Weight loss, exercise and lifestyle changes, such as smoking cessation and avoidance of sleeping medications and alcohol or drugs.
 - These factors cannot be overemphasized. Heaviness is the most common factor of all these problems. Some people are markedly overweight and some are only mildly overweight. The actual numbers do not matter. What matters is how it narrows the airway. These changes are very difficult to accomplish. They require a lot of personal insight and motivation, along with professional help.
- Treatment of diseases of the nose and throat such as chronic sinusitis and allergies.
 - If you cannot breathe well when you are awake, you will certainly have more problems when you try to sleep. So treatment of these problems is important as well.
- Treatment of side effects of sleep apnea such as high blood pressure and daytime fatigue.
- CPAP
 - Please refer to the article on our website about sleep apnea. This is the ‘gold standard’ of treatment.

The importance of these treatments cannot be overemphasized. Sleep apnea is a chronic, long term problem. There is no easy fix for it, so these treatments are necessary to help reduce and limit the disorder.

Surgical treatment

Surgery can help improve sleep apnea. The downside of surgery is that it does not always help. This is why weight loss and CPAP are so important. The patients who do better with surgery are the patients with less severe forms of sleep apnea. In other words, patients with severe sleep apnea may have still moderate apnea after surgery; patients with mild sleep apnea may have minimal sleep apnea after surgery.

Treatment is geared at improving the flow of air through the nose and throat. It is beyond the scope of this article to outline all of the details of the different surgical options. You need to discuss your specific options with your doctor. In general, some of the problems that can be treated by surgery are:

- deviated septum
- nasal polyps
- chronic sinusitis