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Reduce Your Risk™



Talking With a Healthcare Professional About Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Sleep is an important part of overall health.

Changes in sleep, breathing during sleep or daytime energy can sometimes provide clues about what is happening in the body.

Obstructive sleep apnea, or OSA, happens when your upper airway becomes blocked, reducing airflow or causing pauses in breathing during sleep. Because many signs happen during sleep, they can be easy to miss. A family member, caregiver or sleep partner may notice changes first.

OSA can also affect more than sleep. Changes in breathing and oxygen during the night can affect daytime energy, mood and thinking. OSA is also connected with the heart and overall health.

This guide can help identify changes, prepare for a healthcare visit and choose questions to ask about sleep, testing and next steps.

1 Start with what has been noticed

OSA can look different from person to person.

Some signs happen during sleep. Others might happen during the day.



What has been happening during sleep?

Check any that apply:

- ☐ Loud or frequent snoring
- ☐ Gasping or choking during sleep
- ☐ Pauses or changes in breathing
- ☐ Restless or interrupted sleep
- ☐ Waking up often
- ☐ Other changes: _____



What has been happening during the day?

Check any that apply:

- ☐ Feeling very sleepy
- ☐ Feeling tired even after a full night of sleep
- ☐ Morning headaches
- ☐ Trouble focusing or remembering things
- ☐ Changes in mood or feeling more irritable
- ☐ Other changes: _____

Having one or more of these signs does not always mean you have OSA.
Symptoms alone are not enough to diagnose OSA. A healthcare professional can review symptoms, health history and other information to decide whether testing may be helpful.

What has someone else noticed?

A family member, caregiver or sleep partner may notice things that happen during sleep.



Ask whether they have noticed:

- ☐ Loud snoring
- ☐ Gasping or choking
- ☐ Pauses in breathing
- ☐ Frequent movement or waking
- ☐ Other changes during sleep: _____

Add these observations to the conversation guide at the end of this document.

2 Think about sleep and the bigger health picture

Sleep is connected to many parts of health.

That makes it helpful to talk about more than snoring or feeling tired.



Consider other health information that may be important to share:

- ☐ Current health conditions
- ☐ Current medications
- ☐ Changes in weight
- ☐ Changes in energy
- ☐ Changes in mood, memory or concentration
- ☐ Previous sleep concerns or sleep testing
- ☐ Family history of sleep apnea
- ☐ Other recent changes in health

OSA is linked to other health conditions. Changes in heart health and overall health can also be important to discuss. Looking at sleep along with the rest of your health can help create a more complete picture.

3 Get ready for the conversation

There is no perfect way to bring up sleep.

A conversation could start with:

"I have had some changes in sleep and daytime energy. Could sleep apnea or another sleep problem be playing a role?"





Choose questions to ask.

Select the questions that feel most helpful:

- ☐ Could these signs be related to OSA?
- ☐ Could sleep be affecting other parts of my health?
- ☐ Could another health condition be affecting sleep?
- ☐ Should OSA testing be considered?
- ☐ What should a family member or sleep partner watch for?
- ☐ Is there anything that would be helpful to track?
- ☐ Are there steps that may support healthier sleep now?

The goal is not to arrive with all the answers. Sharing what has been happening and asking questions can help you and your healthcare professional decide together what should happen next.

4 If a sleep test is recommended

Testing can help provide more information about what is happening with breathing during sleep.

There are different ways to test for OSA. Some adults may be able to complete a sleep apnea test at home. Others may need an overnight sleep study in a sleep center. The type of test depends on symptoms, health history and other factors. Talk with your healthcare professional to decide what test is right for you.



Questions about testing.

Choose the questions to ask:

- ☐ What type of sleep test may be appropriate?
- ☐ Can testing be done at home?
- ☐ What will the test measure?
- ☐ What happens during the test?
- ☐ Is there anything that needs to be done to prepare?
- ☐ When will the results be available?
- ☐ What will the results help explain?
- ☐ What happens after testing?
- ☐ What happens if the test does not show OSA, but sleep concerns continue?

A test result is one part of the overall picture. Symptoms, health history and other health information can also help guide what happens next.

5 Understand the results

Once testing is complete, the next step is understanding what the results mean.

A healthcare professional can help explain whether OSA was found, what happened with breathing during sleep and how the results fit with symptoms and overall health.

Questions about results.

- ☐ Do the results show OSA?
- ☐ What do the results mean?
- ☐ How severe is the OSA?
- ☐ Could sleep apnea be affecting other parts of my health?
- ☐ Are there other sleep concerns that I should consider?
- ☐ Is there anything in the results that we should watch over time?
- ☐ What are the next steps?

Understanding the results can make it easier to take part in decisions about what happens next.

6 Think about what matters most

If OSA is found, there may be choices about next steps and treatment.

Before making those decisions, take a moment to think about what matters most. There may not be one approach that fits everyone. Health needs, daily routines and personal preferences can all be part of the decision.



Choose what matters most.

- ☐ Getting better sleep
- ☐ Feeling less tired during the day
- ☐ Supporting heart and overall health
- ☐ Comfort
- ☐ Finding something that fits into daily routines
- ☐ Finding something that works with travel
- ☐ Cost or insurance coverage
- ☐ Understanding possible benefits and side effects
- ☐ Something else: _____

7 Explore the choices together

If OSA is found, a healthcare professional can explain which treatment choices may be appropriate based on overall health and personal needs.

For each option, ask:

How does it work? Understand what the treatment does and how it is used.

How could it help? Discuss possible benefits and what improvement might look like.

What should be considered? Talk about comfort, side effects, daily routines, cost or other health conditions or concerns.



Questions about **treatment**.

- ☐ What treatment choices may be appropriate?
- ☐ What are the possible benefits of each choice?
- ☐ What are the possible downsides or challenges?
- ☐ How could each choice affect other parts of health?
- ☐ How would each choice fit into daily life?
- ☐ How long might it take to know whether it is helping?
- ☐ What happens if the first choice does not work well?

A treatment decision does not have to be made alone. The goal is for you, with help from your healthcare professional, to find an approach that supports sleep, overall health and what matters most to you.

8 Keep the conversation going

Finding a treatment is not necessarily the end of the conversation.

It can take time to find an approach that works well. Changes in symptoms, comfort, daily life and overall health are all important information to share with your healthcare team.

Follow-up care can vary based on treatment and personal circumstances. For example, additional testing may sometimes be considered if symptoms continue, after major weight changes or if heart health changes.



Check in.

After a treatment has started, consider:

- ☐ Is my sleep getting better?
- ☐ Has daytime tiredness changed?
- ☐ Have nighttime signs changed?
- ☐ Is the treatment comfortable?
- ☐ Is it manageable in everyday life?
- ☐ Are there concerns or barriers making it difficult to use?
- ☐ Has my overall health changed?
- ☐ Is another conversation about the plan needed?

If a treatment is difficult to use or does not seem to be helping, that does not mean treatment has failed. Your plan may need to be adjusted. A healthcare professional can help decide if treatment is working or if changes need to be made.

My Sleep Conversation Guide

Use the information from this guide to create a short summary for your next healthcare visit.

Changes I have noticed:

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

What a family member, caregiver or sleep partner noticed:

_____

Other health information to discuss:

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

What matters most:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Questions to ask:

- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Notes from the conversation:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Learn more at heart.org/OSA.

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