

- Sleep gets rid of toxins and refreshes the brain. It plays an important role in cognitive function and memory.
- In sports and fitness, sleep enhances performance and mental focus and is a key component of restoration and recovery.
- Sleep sharpens concentration at school, enhances safety on the road, and boosts quality, productivity, and profitability at work.

If you think you may have sleep apnea, speak to your doctor.

This summary is not prescriptive or comprehensive. It is intended to build awareness, spark conversations, and hopefully encourage a greater focus on improving sleep quality.

References:

1. Dr. John Fleetham, <https://www.vchri.ca/stories/2020/07/05/keeping-finger-pulse-good-nights-rest-device-sleep-apnea>
2. Dr. Jonathan Jun, <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/the-dangers-of-uncontrolled-sleep-apnea>
3. Dr. Najib Ayas <https://thedailyscan.providencehealthcare.org/2019/06/sleep-apnea/>
4. Canadian Sleep Society Don't Drive Drowsy Fact Sheet
5. Dr. John Fleetham <https://bclung.ca/team/dr-john-fleetham>

For more information

If you are interested in learning more about mental health and sleep, please contact:

The Institute of Mental Health Research – Sleep Research Laboratory at The Royal

1145 Carling Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1Z 7K4

613.722.6521 ext. 6687

sleeplab@uottawa.ca

theroyal.ca/research/sleep-mental-health-research



A WAKE-UP CALL FOR SLEEP APNEA

www.theroyal.ca

Is there more to your snore?³

Sleep apnea is a common but often undiagnosed condition that affects your breathing while you sleep. Most people who have sleep apnea are not even aware of it.

If you have sleep apnea, your airway becomes blocked or collapses repeatedly through the night, cutting off your oxygen—sometimes more than 30 times an hour. It's like having a pillow repeatedly pressed over your face while you're trying to rest.¹

The result? Poor sleep, low energy, and if left untreated, serious risks to your health.

Do you or someone you know experience any of the following?

- Loud snoring and sudden gasping for air while you sleep
- Daytime sleepiness
- Morning headaches
- Problems concentrating and remembering
- Mood changes, irritability, anxiety and depression
- Frequent nightmares

If so, you may have sleep apnea.

The most common type of sleep apnea, **obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)**, occurs when muscles in the throat temporarily obstruct the airway. The sleeper wakes briefly to resume breathing but usually doesn't remember doing so. These repeated interruptions lower the oxygen levels our brain and bodies need and disrupt restful sleep.

Central sleep apnea is less common. It occurs when the brain doesn't send the right signals to the muscles that control breathing.

Sleep apnea affects people of all ages and body types. Research shows sleep apnea:

- affects about three per cent of people who have a clinically "normal" weight and over 20 per cent of people who are obese²
- is more common in men, although rates rise sharply in women after menopause²
- is more prevalent in older adults
- can also affect infants, children and adolescents
- is up to three times more likely in patients who have a first-degree relative with sleep apnea³

The two biggest challenges in diagnosis and treatment are undiagnosed or untreated sleep apnea and stopping treatment after diagnosis. CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) is highly effective, but only if it is used consistently. Unfortunately, only about half of patients stop using it as prescribed.³

Ten years ago, approximately 80-85 per cent of people with sleep apnea were undiagnosed. Thanks to increased awareness, that figure is now probably closer to 50 per cent.³



Sleep apnea is known to have serious health risks. These could include:

- High blood pressure, coronary artery disease, heart attack, stroke
- Obesity (although it's important to note that not everyone with sleep apnea is obese)²
- Diabetes that is unrelated to obesity. Sleep apnea can increase blood sugar levels.²
- Changes in mental health, including depression, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts
- Higher risk of cognitive decline and dementia
- Increased cancer risk due to oxidative stress damaging the DNA in healthy cells
- Eye conditions such as glaucoma
- Thyroid dysfunction
- Post-operative complications from anesthesia
- Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD)
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- Kidney disease

Sleep apnea is also linked to **other serious and preventable issues**. Drowsy driving is a leading cause of motor vehicle accidents. In Canada, driver fatigue is estimated to play a role in 20 per cent of fatal collisions.⁴ Sleep loss also takes a significant economic toll. It's linked to higher rates of workplace injuries, along with increased medical expenses and financial strain.⁴

Diet, exercise, and sleep are the cornerstones of a long and healthy life. While most people focus on the first two, sleep is just as important to our overall health and well-being.⁵