

# SNORING

Snoring is a noise caused when floppy tissue at the back of the throat blocks the upper air passages during sleep. Turbulent airflow creates quite violent vibrations of the soft palate or other structures in the mouth, nose and throat. These vibrations can produce snoring sounds of such resonance that they can be heard throughout the house and curtail the sleep of anyone who's in it! Most cases of snoring are easily remedied and there's a good chance that simple treatment or a change in lifestyle will significantly improve things. But other cases are more complex and need specialist investigation and treatment.

## What are the causes?

Some factors make us more likely to snore. Smoking, being overweight, consumption of alcohol, use of sleeping pills, poor sleeping position and reaction to house dust are all implicated.

When we are asleep, we are lying down and hence gravity acts to pull on all the tissues of the body, but the tissues of the pharynx are relatively soft and floppy. Therefore when we lie on our backs, gravity pulls the palate, tonsils and tongue backwards. This often narrows the airway enough to cause turbulence in airflow and thus snoring. Frequently if the snorer rolls onto his or her side, the tissues are no longer pulled backwards and the snoring lessens. Some medications, in addition to alcohol, can lead to enhanced relaxation during sleep. As the muscles of the tongue, neck and pharynx relax more, the airways collapse more. This leads to a smaller airway and more tissue vibration. Other factors which may be implicated include: small or collapsing nostrils, overnight nasal congestion or nasal polyps.

Snoring in itself isn't serious but it can be a symptom of a more serious disorder, sleep apnoea, in which the snorer stops breathing several times an hour during sleep. People with sleep apnoea are prone to irregular heartbeats, possibly even heart attacks. Common symptoms are loud snoring and feelings of choking/ shortness of breath at night. One's GP can refer a person for special tests to diagnose the cause of snoring and thus sleep apnoea can be detected if this is the problem.

## Treatments for snoring

There are a number of new surgical operations for snorers who are found to have obstructions of the mouth, nose and throat. You can ask your GP about the possibility.

The main categories of non-surgical treatment of snoring are:

- Behavioural changes,
- Dental devices,
- Nasal devices and
- Other products

Behavioural changes include weight reduction, changing sleeping positions, avoiding alcohol and changing medications. Weight loss alone may provide a complete cure so a sensible eating plan is advisable.

Snoring is exacerbated by normal airflow through a narrow area in the throat. Part of the narrowing is caused by the tongue and palate falling back during sleep. Some dental devices have been developed that hold the jaw forward or which hold the palate up and forward. All devices are best made by a dentist to ensure a correct fit without causing problems.

For people with narrow nasal passages, snoring can be alleviated with nasal device medications. Breath-right<sup>®</sup> strips open the front part of the nasal valve and thus snoring may improve. If nasal mucosal swelling from allergies or irritation is causing the problem, nasal sprays may help. For instance, nasal saline irrigation spray is a way to clean and moisturise the nasal lining since environmental irritants that stay in the nose (dust, pollen) continue to irritate as long as they are present.

There are many over the counter anti snoring devices such as a snoring ring, which you wear on your small finger while you sleep. It uses the principle of Tuina, a form of acupuncture to relieve snoring and is successful for many people. The ring is called Silent Knight<sup>®</sup> and is available in Whelehans. Sprays such as Snoreeze<sup>®</sup> and Silence<sup>®</sup> can prove effective to reduce snoring. These treatments are also available in Whelehans .

**Disclaimer: Please ensure you consult with your healthcare professional before making any changes recommended**

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