

Newcastle Regional Sleep Service

Snoring and what you can do about it

Introduction

This leaflet provides information about snoring and outlines some of the treatments that may help. Snoring can disturb the sleep of others and lead to much unhappiness. There are things that can be done to help snoring. Many of them do not need medical help. Snoring can be a sign of a condition called obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA). This affects your breathing at night, causing poor quality sleep and makes you very sleepy during the day. If you suspect that you might have apnoea as well as snoring, discuss it with your doctor.

Causes of snoring <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/snoring/>

Snoring is caused by narrowing of the airway behind the tongue. This makes the walls of the throat begin to vibrate. These vibrations are the sound of snoring. So, anything which narrows your airway makes you more likely to snore, such as –

- Alcohol and sedatives (sleeping tablets), which make your airway muscles flop inwards.
- A blocked nose, which makes you breathe in with more effort. The effort drops the pressure in the back of the throat, sucking in the walls. So, hayfever, a cold, smoking, or nasal polyps all encourage snoring.
- A big neck, usually due to being overweight, will squash the airway behind the tongue from the outside. If your neck is over about 17 inches, you are at high risk of snoring.
- Smoking can inflame both the nose and the back of the throat making them narrower.
- Enlarged tonsils, which block up the space at the back of the throat.
- Some medical conditions, such as an underactive thyroid gland seem to narrow the airway behind the tongue.
- The size of the airway behind the tongue will also vary with posture. If you lie on your back, gravity pushes your tongue backwards. Try lying on your side to quieten things down

What to do

There are three levels of snoring treatment.

Level 1

- **Wax ear plugs**, rather than foam ones, work best if your partner is prepared to wear them to reduce the disturbance from your snoring. Wax plugs are the only ones that reduce the low frequencies of snoring.
- **Weight loss** to reduce your neck size is nearly always helpful but can be difficult to achieve. For help with weight loss please access www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/start-the-nhs-weight-loss-plan/
- **Reduce alcohol**, especially after 6 pm.
- **Stop smoking** To access Newcastle Stop Smoking Service please Telephone: 0191 269 1103 Website: changeGrowLive.org Twitter: @quit_newcastle Facebook: Newcastle Stop Smoking Service
- **Keep the nose as clear as possible** - this may need hayfever-type medication such as a steroid nasal spray.
- **Raise the head of the bed** slightly so that one is sleeping propped up. Do not simply use extra pillows. These may kink your neck and make things worse. putting pillows **under** the mattress at the head end, or using a prop under the bed frame itself. Rest your head on only one average pillow. Lifting your head and shoulders seems to reduce congestion and block in the nose and throat.
- **Be very wary of purchasing one of the many gimmicks on sale through the web, or from mail order companies. There is no evidence that most of these work reliably. See our leaflet on dental appliances for some that might work in some cases.**

Level 2

The use of **dental devices or mandibular advancement splints (MAS)** to help bad snoring have become popular. If properly made, they can work well for suitable people. They work by holding your lower jaw forward during sleep. This brings the tongue forwards too, opening up the throat air passage. The splint looks a bit like a sports gum shield and in the morning you simply remove it. There are a variety of splints available now, but they need to be carefully moulded to your own gum pattern, by a dentist. We have information on these in a separate leaflet.

Level 3

Some patients have tried all or most of the above – and still snore. If the problem is really disrupting your life, you may end up considering an operation. However, all operations for snoring have a high failure rate - at least 25%, up to 40%, depending on the type. This is because there is usually more than one thing causing the snoring. However hard we try, we have not yet found a good way of predicting who will have a successful result. Nor can we get rid of the other side effects. So, only consider surgery as a last resort after a careful discussion of the benefits and risks with a specialist surgeon.

Contact details

If you have any further concerns or questions, please contact:
Newcastle Regional Sleep Service email: Newcastle.sleep@nhs.net
Freeman Hospital
Newcastle upon Tyne

NE7 7DN

Tel: 0191 233 6161 Monday-Friday, 09.00am -16.00pm

For further information

British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea association - www.britishsnoring.co.uk

British Lung Foundation – www.lunguk.org/media-and-campaigning/media-centre/lung-stats-and-facts/sleepapnoea

NICE (2008): CPAP for OSA <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/11944/40088/40088.pdf>

PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) for help, advice and information about NHS services. You can contact them on Freephone 0800 032 02 02, email northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk or text to 01670511098.

Useful websites

If you would like further information about health conditions and treatment options, you may wish to have a look at the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk.

This leaflet is available in alternative formats on request by telephoning 0191 213 7219

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