WOMEN & SLEEP APNEA

Nearly 1 in 5 women have sleep apnea, a disorder that affects daytime functioning. But about 9 in 10 women with sleep apnea don't know they have it. Here's what you need to know:

1. The signs of sleep apnea in women may not be the same as those in men. For women, signs may be mistaken for depression or menopause. Or they may have no obvious symptoms at all.

2. Sleep apnea is treatable. It is important to start a conversation with your healthcare provider to discuss whether you are at risk for sleep apnea or another sleep disorder.

3. Treatment can improve your life. From your overall well-being to cognition, mental, and physical health, the benefits of treatment can be life-changing.

DAYTIME CLUES

- Feeling depressed, anxious, irritable, or impatient
- Feeling tired, drained, or lacking energy
- Feeling sleepy or falling asleep at the wrong time or place
- Forgetfulness, foggy or fuzzy thinking, trouble with focus and concentration
- Accident proneness

*some of which could be observed by a bed partner or roommate

NIGHTTIME CLUES

- Frequent or loud snoring, gasping, or snorting sounds
- Difficulty falling asleep, frequent awakenings
- Restless sleep, changes in dreaming
- Frequent bathroom visits at night
- Nighttime heartburn

*some of which could be observed by a bed partner or roommate

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Untreated sleep apnea can lead to:

- High blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke
- Depression and other mood problems
- Missing out on the joys of life: fun, laughter, relationships, intimacy
- Fatigue, daytime sleepiness, and accidents
- Problems with alertness, memory and learning
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Overtreatment or mistreatment for other disorders

EVEN WITHOUT THESE SYMPTOMS, YOU MAY STILL BE AT RISK.

These conditions can make you more likely to develop sleep apnea:

- Overweight
- Hypothyroidism (low thyroid function)
- A family member with sleep apnea
- Polycystic ovary syndrome
- Menopause or older age

DOES THIS DESCRIBE YOU?

If you recognize any of these symptoms, share this document with your healthcare provider. It's a great opportunity to begin what could be a life-changing conversation. Together, you can develop a plan for further evaluation, and if necessary, effective treatment.
Identifying your female patients suffering from undiagnosed sleep apnea

**SLEEP APNEA AFFECTS AROUND 17% OF WOMEN**.

The signs and symptoms of sleep apnea in women can be different than those in men. Women with sleep apnea may not report the typical symptom of sleepiness commonly reported by men with sleep apnea. The reverse page lists frequently-reported symptoms.

The prevalence of sleep apnea is 30–80% in people with:

- Hypertension
- Diabetes
- Insomnia
- Atrial fibrillation
- Anxiety and/or depression

These conditions should trigger concern regarding sleep apnea, either as a co-morbidity or a consequence of untreated sleep apnea. There is evidence suggesting some comorbidities can improve with successful apnea treatment.²,³

In caring for your female patient, take care to also note:

- Polycystic ovary syndrome in young women with severe sleep apnea is under-recognized, and vice versa
- Pregnancy: sleep apnea during pregnancy is a risk factor for:
  - Adverse fetal health outcomes
  - Pre-eclampsia and gestational hypertension
  - Gestational diabetes
  - Maternal death
- Menopause can precipitate, or worsen existing sleep apnea

**TESTING & TREATMENT**

The most common diagnostic test is the Home Sleep Test (HST); however, HSTs may give “false negative” readings. Rates of false negative readings can vary widely from 10% to over 20%.⁴ Since respiratory disturbances during sleep in women are frequently associated with arousals rather than oxygen desaturation, HSTs often underestimate sleep apnea in women. A negative HST should be followed by a laboratory sleep study (polysomnography) if the clinical suspicion for sleep apnea is high. In women, the common co-occurrence of insomnia and sleep apnea may increase the likelihood of a false negative home sleep study.

**For more resources, please visit:** MyApnea.org: https://myapnea.org/ and Society for Women’s Health Research: http://swhr.org

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