



HELENA FAMILY DENTISTRY

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Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is a disorder in which a person stops breathing repeatedly throughout the night, which leads to a lack of oxygen, physiologic stress, and inflammation. Sleep apnea is very pertinent to dentistry because many of the signs and symptoms are evident in the mouth. In addition, there are multiple dental-related treatment modalities.

Sleep apnea increases the risk of heart attack, stroke, diabetes, obesity, cancer, depression, car accidents, and sudden death. In general, the lifespan of someone with sleep apnea will be decreased by years and will have a lower quality of life.

Sleep apnea can affect anyone, but some of the common risk factors include: being male, obesity, age over 40, large neck (over 17"), nasal congestion, allergies, acid reflux, family history of sleep apnea, **enlarged tonsils, small jaws, narrow dental arches, tooth wear (clenching/grinding), receding chin, scalloped tongue**

It is estimated that 80-90% of people with sleep apnea are not diagnosed. The standard diagnosis for sleep apnea is made with a sleep study, although a simpler take home screening test such as the system we have in our dental office can be done first.

There are numerous options to treat sleep apnea which fall into the four categories below:

- 1) Conservative options: weight loss, sleep positional therapy, nasal breathing therapy, stress reduction, myofunctional therapy, laser therapy, acupuncture, and even digeridoo playing! (to tighten the airway muscles)
- 2) CPAP (and other PAP devices) – considered the gold standard for sleep apnea treatment

- 3) Dental appliances
 - a. Mandibular advancement devices – open the airway by positioning the lower jaw forward and opening the airway
 - b. Palatal expanders and other orthodontic treatment - can increase the volume of the nasal cavity
- 4) Surgery – jaw surgery, other surgeries performed by an ENT physician

We would be happy to discuss what options may be best for you.

References:

[“Totally CPAP”](#) by Steven Y. Park, M.D. - a must-have book for anyone using CPAP

[“Why We Sleep”](#) by Matthew Walker, PhD - a book about the importance of sleep

[“Breath”](#) by James Nestor