Snoring

**Definition**
Snoring is a loud, hoarse, or harsh breathing sound that occurs during sleep.

**Considerations**
Snoring is common in adults and is not necessarily a sign of an underlying disorder.

Sometimes, however, snoring can be a sign of a sleep disorder called sleep apnea. This means you have periods when you completely or partly stop breathing for more than 10 seconds while you sleep. The episode is followed by a sudden snort or gasp when breathing resumes. Then, snoring starts all over again. If you have sleep apnea, this cycle generally happens multiple times a night. Sleep apnea is not as common as snoring.

A doctor (or a sleep specialist) can tell if you have sleep apnea by doing a sleep study either at home or in a hospital setting.

Snoring is an important social problem. Persons who share a bed with someone who snores can develop sleep difficulties.

**Causes**
In most people, the reason for snoring is not known. Some potential causes (other than sleep apnea) include:

- Being overweight, which leads to excessive neck tissue that puts pressure on the airways
- Last month of pregnancy
- Nasal congestion from colds or allergies, especially if it lasts a long time
- Swelling of the muscular part of the roof of the mouth (soft palate) or uvula, the piece of tissue that hangs down in the back of the mouth
- Swollen adenoids and tonsils that block the airways
- Use of sleeping pills, antihistamines, or alcohol at bedtime
- Prominence of the area at the base of the tongue
- Large tongue size compared to the mouth
- Abnormalities in the bones of the face

**Home Care**
The following tips can help reduce snoring:

- Avoid alcohol and other sedatives at bedtime.
- Don't sleep flat on your back. Sleep on your side, if possible. Some doctors even suggest sewing a golf or tennis ball into the back of your night clothes. This causes discomfort if you roll over and helps reminds you to stay on your side. Eventually, sleeping on your side becomes a habit and you don't need to be reminded.
- Lose weight, if you are overweight.
- Try over-the-counter, drug-free nasal strips that help widen the nostrils. (These are not intended as treatments for sleep apnea.)

**When to Contact a Medical Professional**
Talk to your doctor if you have:

- Excessive daytime drowsiness, morning headaches, recent weight gain, awakening in the morning not feeling rested, or change in your level of attention, concentration, or memory
- Episodes of no breathing (apnea) -- your partner may need to tell you if this is happening
Children with chronic snoring should also be evaluated for apnea. Sleep apnea in children has been linked to growth problems, ADHD, poor school performance, learning difficulties, bedwetting, and high blood pressure. Most children who snore do NOT have apnea, but a sleep study is the only reliable way to tell for sure.

Referral to a sleep specialist for sleep studies may be needed.

Treatment options include:

- Dental appliances to prevent tongue from falling back
- Weight loss
- If you have sleep apnea, use of a CPAP mask (a device you wear on the nose while sleeping to decrease snoring and sleep apnea)
- Surgical procedures on your palate
- Surgery to correct a deviated septum or remove tonsils (tonsillectomy)
- Other types of surgery involving the airway

For more information, visit the Franciscan Health Library at [www.FHSHealth.org/Health_Education.aspx](http://www.FHSHealth.org/Health_Education.aspx)