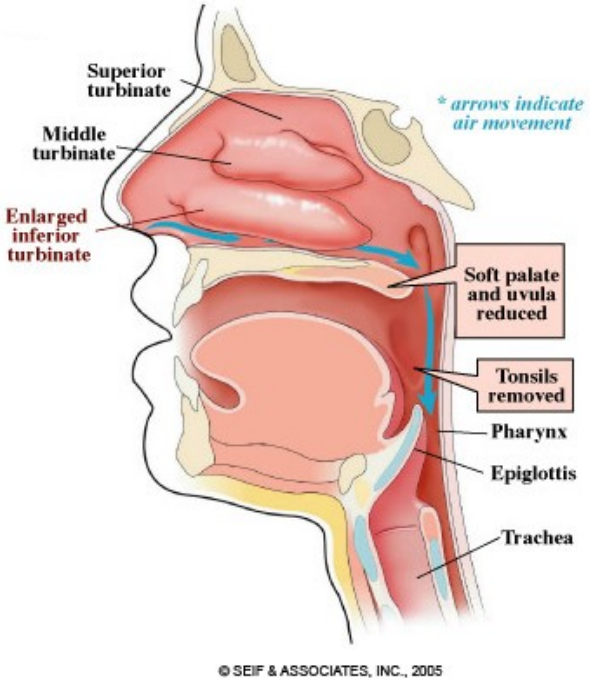
Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is a common disorder. The main problem of this disorder is excessive daytime sleepiness and compromised quality of life. This includes social and emotional problems. There are two types of sleep apnea.

- *Obstructive sleep apnea* is when breathing stops due to a blocked airway.
- *Central sleep apnea* is a malfunction of the brain's normal signal to breathe.



SYMPTOMS OF SLEEP APNEA MAY INCLUDE:

- Restless sleep.
- Falling asleep while driving and/or during the day.
- Loss of energy.
- Irritability.
- Mood or behavior changes.
- Loud, heavy snoring.
- Morning headaches.
- Trouble concentrating.
- Forgetfulness.
- Anxiety or depression.
- Decreased interest in sex.

Not all people with sleep apnea have all of these symptoms. However, people who have a few of these symptoms should visit their caregiver for an evaluation. Problems related to untreated sleep apnea include:

- High blood pressure (*hypertension*).
- Coronary artery disease.
- Impotence.
- Cognitive dysfunction.
- Memory loss.

TREATMENT

- For mild cases, treatment may include avoiding sleeping on one's back.
- For people with nasal congestion, a decongestant may be prescribed.
- Patients with obstructive and central apnea should avoid depressants. This includes alcohol, sedatives and narcotics. Weight loss and diet control are encouraged for overweight patients.
- Many serious cases of obstructive sleep apnea can be relieved by a treatment called nasal continuous positive airway pressure (nasal CPAP). Nasal CPAP uses a mask-like device and pump that work together to keep the airway open. The pump delivers air pressure during each breath. Surgery may help some patients by stopping or reducing the narrowing of the airway due to anatomical defects.

PROGNOSIS

Removing the obstruction usually reverses hypertension and cardiac problems. Untreated, sleep apnea sufferers have a tendency to fall asleep during the day. This is can result in serious accident or loss of ones job.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

Sleep apnea is currently one of the most active areas of sleep research.

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