

## IT MAY BE A DANGER SIGN.

For 18 million adults and their families, snoring is nothing to joke about. That is because these individuals do not just snore; they suffer from a serious sleep disorder called *obstructive sleep apnea syndrome (OSAS)*.

Obstructive sleep apnea is a condition that causes the throat's air passageway to close intermittently during sleep, stopping breathing and disrupting the normal stages of sleep. The results can be devastating and can even lead to serious illness or death.

The signs and symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea are often confusing. **The classical symptoms are loud snoring and excessive daytime sleepiness**, but other symptoms can include:

- Obesity
- Irritability
- Congestive heart failure
- Sexual Problems/Impotence
- Irregular heart beats
- Insomnia
- Depression
- Morning headaches

Until relatively recently, the only recognized testing procedure used for diagnosing obstructive apnea was overnight polysomnography in a hospital sleep disorders center. Because of the expense, inconvenience and anxiety that this causes for the patient, many physicians were hesitant to use this test-especially if patients have less than the classical symptoms.

Now, in-home sleep apnea recording devices are available. This new approach makes sleep apnea testing much more widely available to both patients and their physicians.

### Testing at Home

Using the latest in compact multiphysiologic recording technology, patients are monitored while they sleep in their homes. Monitoring usually includes heart rate, respiratory effort, air flow, blood oxygen saturation, snoring sounds and body position. The test records continuous overnight information, painlessly and non-invasively. Published medical studies have shown this technique to be as effective, if not more effective, than equivalent complex testing done in sleep disorders centers for patients with simple sleep disordered breathing.

In-home sleep apnea testing simplifies the diagnosis of this treatable disorder in three ways. First, cost of initial testing is about 25% the cost of a complex polysomnogram at a sleep disorder center. Second, testing takes place in the convenience and privacy of the home. Third, testing can be accomplished quickly (in some cases, within a day or two).

In-home sleep apnea testing is relatively easy to accomplish. A technician will visit you at home to set up the compact recording system and explain the system's use. After leaving, the technician remains on call through the night to respond to any questions that may arise.

In the morning when the study is complete, the recording equipment is picked up and the results of the test are scored by a specialist who analyzes the data for periods of respiratory disturbances (pauses in breathing, slow or fast heart rate, decrease in blood oxygen level, etc). The results are reviewed and interpreted by a qualified physician (usually a pulmonary medicine specialist) and the findings reported to the referral source. In many cases this entire process can be accomplished *in less than twenty-four hours*.

### Treatment at Home

If the test is positive for obstructive sleep apnea, treatment can begin quickly (in some instances, the next day). Once diagnosed, obstructive sleep apnea can be easily treated. The treatment of choice is "nasal CPAP" (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure). Nasal CPAP is a non-invasive technique that uses a small, soft mask or "nasal pillows" that fit over the nose. This mask is connected by a tube to a small air blower. The blower supplies a steady stream of air to the mask along with a small amount of pressure. It is this small amount of pressure that keeps the upper airway from collapsing, thus diminishing if not obliterating snoring and allowing air to move freely in and out of the lungs during sleep. Naturally, this system is only worn at bedtime and can be used anywhere there is a source of electricity (AC or DC).

It is usually not necessary to see a specialist for the diagnosis and treatment of simple sleep disordered breathing. The general practitioner is qualified to treat and follow the progress of patients who have obstructive sleep apnea syndrome. Referral to a sleep disorders specialist is normally done when a patient has other sleep disorders in addition to obstructive sleep apnea syndrome.

The normal person spends a third of his/her life sleeping. It just doesn't make sense to spend the remaining waking hours of the day feeling tired. Sleep apnea is currently one of the most under-diagnosed medical conditions. So if you feel you might be suffering from sleep disordered breathing such as obstructive sleep apnea, please speak up about it with your doctor.