

# BBC Radio Shropshire Factsheet

## Sleep Apnoea

Compiled 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2004

Sleep disorders might seem trivial to some, but to those suffering from them, they can be extremely distressing, and can seriously affect the health.

The most common form of apnoea is obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) syndrome. This a respiratory condition where during sleep the throat repeatedly narrows or closes. Each time this happens air is blocked from getting into the lungs. When apnoea occurs low oxygen levels causes the brain to wake the person up, but this is so brief that usually they won't remember it.

- The person with OSA syndrome will usually snore and wake frequently during the night.
- Their bed partner may report that they snore and stop breathing frequently whilst asleep.
- The condition is often associated with heavy snoring.
- It's estimated that OSA syndrome affects around one in 25 men and one in 50 women between the ages of 30-60 years old.
- Many people are unaware that they have it.
- Men are affected four times as often as women.
- Developing OSA syndrome becomes more likely as people get older.
- Being overweight, smoking and drinking more than safe recommended amounts of alcohol increases the risk of it.
- Keeping to an ideal weight, not smoking and not drinking excessively will help to reduce the chances of developing OSA syndrome.
- Regular exercise can help a person lessen the number of apnoea attacks. Alteration of sleeping position may help.

If you suspect you may be suffering from OSA, you should consult your GP, who may refer you to a specialist sleep clinic.

Although other forms of treatment are available, probably the most effective is a machine called a Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machine.

CPAPs can be supplied by the NHS, but there is inevitably a long delay. To avoid waiting, many people opt to buy privately. There are several companies to be found on the Internet supplying the equipment.

OSA is the commonest form of sleep apnoea, but there is also a condition called Central Sleep Apnoea (CSA). This is where the brain 'forgets' to make you breathe.

It can also be associated with weakness of the breathing muscles. Oxygen therapy during sleep and drug treatment, could be prescribed.

## Driving

A frequent result of sleep apnoea is daytime drowsiness, so of course there is the possibility that driving could be dangerous.

For private cars (Group 1 entitlement) - Driving must stop if there is excessive daytime sleepiness. Driving will again be permitted when satisfactory control of the symptoms is achieved, based on a specialist report.

For PSV/HGV (Group 2 entitlement) - Driving must cease on diagnosis and cannot be resumed until the DVLA has received confirmation from the specialist that the condition is controlled. This should be possible soon after starting CPAP if all goes well. Contact:

Drivers Medical Unit  
DVLA  
Swansea  
SA99 1TU  
01792 783 705.

For further information about apnoea, contact:

The Sleep Apnoea Trust  
7 Bailey Close  
High Wycombe  
HP13 6QA

Tel: 01494 527772

Or look at their web site: [www.sleep-apnoea-trust.org](http://www.sleep-apnoea-trust.org)

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The Shropshire clinic specialising in sleep disorders is at:

Department of Respiratory Medicine  
Princess Royal Hospital  
Apley Castle  
Leegomery  
Telford  
Shropshire  
TF1 6TF  
Tel: 01952 641222

There is an article on sleep apnoea in the extensive health section of the BBC web site at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/conditions/sleepapnoea1.shtml>

The British Sleep Society is a registered British charity aiming to improve public health by promoting education and research into sleep and its disorders.

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Colne  
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