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SNORE? NO MORE!

BY BENJAMIN S. FISS, D.D.S.

In honor of Sleep Awareness Week (March 7-14), it's an opportune time to share some of the latest advances in the area of snoring and Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA). Snoring and OSA are both medical and personal concerns.

As a medical issue, OSA is as prevalent as diabetes and asthma, and in many cases, can be just as life threatening. Snoring may seem like a harmless annoyance, but the underlying causes could be a red flag to more serious problems. Snoring affects over 90 million Americans. That translates into approximately one third of the population of the U.S. Snoring is caused by a narrowing of one's airways during sleep. It can become even worse in conjunction with smoking, excessive weight and alcohol consumption.

Snoring can also lead to Obstructive Sleep Apnea. Sometimes during sleep, as people snore, the airway becomes completely blocked, causing breathing to stop. When the blockage causes an individual to stop breathing for more than 10 seconds, this is considered OSA. Due to the lack of oxygen during these events, the body reacts by releasing adrenaline, thereby increasing blood pressure and heart rate. Sleep is also disturbed, making it impossible to get a good night's sleep, which in turn leads to excessive daytime sleepiness. In severe untreated cases, this may lead to heart failure and stroke.

As a personal issue, snoring and sleep apnea can affect relationships, as in many cases it's impossible to sleep in the same room, much less the same bed, as a snorer. One person usually winds up sleeping on the couch or in another room. The partner as well as the snorer have a three-fold increase in auto accidents, depression, as well as loss of productivity at work.

The good news is snoring and OSA can be treated and the results have been dramatic. I have recently completed a course in the Advance Practice of Dental Sleep Medicine. Depending on the severity, accredited dentists in Dental Sleep Medicine can make oral appliances to keep the airways open. In severe cases, an oral appliance can be affixed to an external machine called a CPAP. This machine forces air into the nasal cavity opening the airway. The major issue with the CPAP is non-compliance (not wearing the device). However, once you get used to wearing the oral appliance, you find that because of the benefits, you don't want to sleep without it. It's truly life changing to get a good night sleep. It can save your life (and your marriage)! ■

Benjamin Fiss, DDS has been practicing, specializing in general, cosmetic and restorative dentistry for 31 years. Dr. Fiss has been certified in fabrication of oral appliance of sleep apnea and snoring since 1987. He is a member of the American Academy of Dental Sleep Medicine and Academy of Sleep Medicine. He also has been named one of America's top dentists every year since 2003 by the Consumer Research Council of America.