

Sleep your way to better Health!



In reading the title of this column, you may be thinking...“Sleep for health, no problem! I wish I could stop working and take a nap right now!” You may even glance at your venti latte with an extra shot of espresso and think... “I know I need better sleep, but how?”

To solve the “how,” we must first ask “why?” Taking the time to determine the diagnosis and therefore the source of the problem creates insight as to the solution. By advancing my health-centered dental education, I learned to identify signs within the mouth that indicate sleeping disorders such as sleep apnea as well as solutions like sleep appliances to treat these conditions.

The definition of Sleep Apnea, according to the National Institute for Health, is “a common disorder in which you have one or more pauses in breathing or shallow breaths while you sleep.” These cessations in breathing may last for a few seconds or minutes and may occur multiple times per hour triggering the individual to wake gasping or choking for air. As a result, deep sleep is not fully achieved and the person feels fatigued and exhausted in the morning. In addition, several dangerous co-morbidities (related medical conditions) are common in patients with sleep apnea. For example, untreated apneics have a 68% higher risk of cancer and are 3x more likely to suffer a stroke.

The link between sleep, health, and dentistry was discovered through research of another common dental disorder: bruxism (the grinding of teeth). Researchers surmised that the reason people grind their teeth may not simply be stress or anxiety but rather the brain attempting to open the airway during apneic episodes i.e. an open airway allows continuous airflow for continuous breathing.

Thanks to these innovative individuals focused on the “why”, qualified dentists screen patients, order sleep studies, and prescribe custom sleep appliances which open the airway improving the quality of sleep and of life for their patients! As a health-centered dentist, I am grateful for the opportunity to treat the WHOLE patient. Identifying risks for sleep apnea and designing appliances to treat this condition has become a natural extension of our health-centered model.

Please take the time to answer the questions below and rate your level of sleepiness.

Are you likely to fall asleep in these circumstances?

- | |
|---|
| <p>1. Sitting talking to someone: _____</p> <p>2. In a car, while stopped in traffic for a few minutes: _____</p> <p>3. Watching TV: _____</p> |
|---|

- No chance of dozing = 0
- Slight chance of dozing =1
- Moderate chance of dozing =2
- High chance of dozing = 3

Remember, only qualified dentists with advanced training in the anatomy of the TMJ joints and sleep appliances can offer these services. If you are concerned you may be suffering from sleep apnea, contact your physician or our office to be properly screened.

Scoring: If in reading these questions you felt you were unlikely to fall asleep, your sleeping is most likely normal. If your answers indicate a slight, moderate or high chance for 2 out of the 3 questions... a more in-depth screening and discussion with a health professional is indicated.

