

## **SLEEP APNEA**

Sleep apnea is described as a period of "not breathing" for 10 seconds or more while sleeping. The most common type is called *obstructive sleep apnea* (OSA). OSA results from a blockage of your windpipe, which generally is caused by the tongue, tonsils, or excess tissue in the throat. It can affect anyone, but is seen mostly in obese individuals. *Central apnea* (CA) may result from an abnormality in brain function that prevents the "breathing" stimulus from reaching the *diaphragm* (large muscle in the chest important in breathing), other chest wall muscles, and the lungs. Other causes include a stroke, brain tumors, or chronic respiratory disorders. Often the cause is unknown. You are more likely to have sleep apnea if you are obese; have high blood pressure; hypothyroidism or heart disease; suffer from depression or anxiety; abuse alcoholic beverages or smoke.

### **Symptoms may include:**

- Snoring with pauses in breathing cycle that may last 1 to 2 minutes
- Choking and gasping for breath during sleep that may cause you to awaken
- Unusual sleepiness, irritability and decreased energy levels during the day
- Interrupted sleep patterns, insomnia, and headache upon awakening
- Inability to "get a good night's sleep"

### **What your doctor can do:**

#### *Diagnose the disease by:*

- Performing a physical exam and reviewing your medical history and current medications.
- Ordering laboratory blood tests, an electroencephalogram (EEG) test that checks the brain's electrical activity, and observing your sleep patterns in a sleep lab.

#### *Treatment may include:*

- Surgery for the removal of excess throat tissue (e.g., tonsils).
- Ordering a special mask and small air-compressor called Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) or a mouth-piece to keep the airway open during sleep.
- Prescription of certain medications in severe cases.

### **What you can do:**

- Weight reduction is important if you are overweight.
- Sleep on your side, not your back. Attach a ping-pong ball or tennis ball to your pajamas to keep you off your back.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages and sleep aids.
- Start an exercise program with your doctor's permission and advice.
- Use your CPAP and/or mouth-piece regularly

**Contact your doctor** if symptoms continue or worsen despite treatment.

**Seek immediate medical assistance**, if you develop difficulty breathing, chest pain, or shortness of breath!