

# Health Tips for Parents

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## Does my child have obstructive sleep apnea?

Sleep apnea – when a person stops breathing during sleep – is usually caused by an obstruction of the upper airway. Approximately 2 to 4 percent of children experience sleep apnea before puberty, rising to 5 percent in adolescence.



“Sleep apnea has both a genetic and environmental component and can occur at any age, depending on the cause,” notes Douglas Li, MD, assistant clinical professor, UCLA Division of Pediatric Pulmonology. Common causes include a facial or airway abnormality, large tonsils and/or adenoids, and obesity. A facial or airway abnormality can cause sleep apnea in children shortly after birth or in infancy. As children grow, their tonsils and adenoids (a mass of tissue in the nasal cavity) also grow in size, peaking around 2 to 6 years of age. These enlarged tissues can cause breathing difficulty at that time. Sleep apnea can affect adolescents, particularly if the child is obese.



Common symptoms of sleep apnea include snoring (not necessarily loud snoring), mouth breathing, and choking or gasping in the middle of the night. Other signs include daytime sleepiness (the child falls asleep in class, while watching TV,

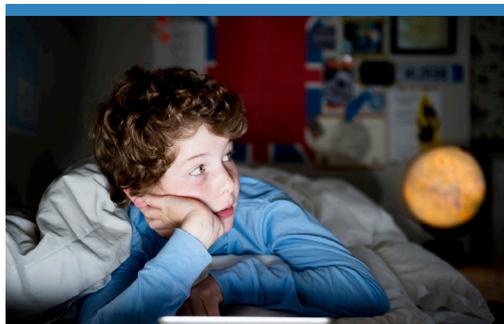
requires regular naps of longer than 30 minutes), poor attention, hyperactivity, inattention, mood issues or excessive sweating during sleep. In severe cases, children may fail to grow or have heart problems.

To diagnose sleep apnea, a sleep study, or polysomnogram, may be ordered to monitor the child overnight in a sleep lab. In the study, sensors – wired to a computer – are placed on a few spots on the child’s body, to provide a detailed record of the child’s sleep state, breathing pattern, oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, eye movements, heart rate, brain waves, snoring, body movements and sleep positions.

Treatments depend on the cause of the apnea and can range from lifestyle modification (weight loss), medications, nightly breathing therapies (such as sleeping with a face mask) and surgery. It is important to receive a comprehensive evaluation from a sleep physician to determine which is most appropriate for your child.

### Symptoms of sleep apnea in kids include:

- snoring, often associated with pauses, snorts or gasps
- heavy breathing while sleeping
- very restless sleep and sleeping in unusual positions
- bedwetting (especially if a child previously stayed dry at night)
- daytime sleepiness or behavioral problems



## Preventative Care

Healthy sleeping habits are the best ways to improve energy and concentration during the day. Having a routine of waking up at the same time every morning helps set the circadian rhythm, or body clock. Create a good sleeping environment an hour before sleeping by using the bed for sleep only, not TV, video games or snacking, and allowing the child the time to relax and transition into a restful sleep state.

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