

Do you have sleep apnea?

Six questions for sleep apnea

These questions can help you and your physician figure out if you should be tested for sleep apnea. Circle your answers, tally up the points next to them, and see what the total means in the Scoring section.

- Do you snore more than three nights a week? Yes (2 points) No (0 points)
- Is your snoring loud (can it be heard through a door or wall)? Yes (2 points) No (0 points)•
- Has anyone ever told you that you briefly stop breathing or gasp when you are asleep? Never (0 points) Occasionally (3 points) Frequently (5 points)
- What is your collar size? Men: less than 17 inches (0 points) 17 inches or greater (5 points)
Women: less than 16 inches (0 points) 16 inches or greater (5 points)
- Have you had high blood pressure, or are you being treated for it? Yes (2 points) No (0 points)
- Do you ever doze or fall asleep during the day when: You are not busy or active? Yes (2 points) No (0 points) You are driving or stopped at a light? Yes (2 points) No (0 points)

Scoring

9 points or more: You are a good candidate for a sleep study.

6–8 points: It's uncertain whether you have sleep apnea; you and your doctor should decide the next step based on other pieces of your medical history.

5 points or fewer: Low probability of sleep apnea.

Tips for using a continuous positive airway pressure machine

A continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) or other breathing device takes some time to get used to. Some people stop using the machine because of pressure sores, nasal congestion, air leakage, and a feeling of claustrophobia. Coaching from a sleep expert may help. Here are some tips on making the device easier to use:

- Obtain the device from a sleep specialist, who can provide detailed instruction at the outset and follow-up coaching.
- Expect an overnight stay at the doctor's office or at a sleep lab, so that air pressure can be adjusted to ensure best results.
- If the mask irritates the skin, ask about special moisturizers for CPAP users. (Petroleum-based products may damage the mask.)

- If the mask irritates the nose, ask about nasal pillows, which fit into the nostrils. These take pressure off the bridge of the nose.
- If nasal congestion develops, ask whether nasal sprays or surgery might correct it.
- Some people breathe through their mouths at night; they will do better with a full-face mask to cover both nose and mouth.
- A chin strap can help keep the jaw closed, so that the mask does not leak air.
- If breathing against the force of the air pressure is too difficult, look into a bilevel device, which lowers the air pressure during exhalation.
- Build up slowly. Most people can't wear the mask all night long at first. Wearing it for a few hours first, then gradually increasing the time with it, may help.