

# MEDICAL MONDAYS | News Notes

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**TOPIC: Sleep Disorders & Treatments**

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## GOOD SLEEP HABITS

Getting a good night's sleep is key to performing at your best during the day. Find out how to get the amount of rest you need.

1. [Are You Getting Enough Sleep?](#)The amount of sleep a person needs depends on many factors, including age.
2. [Stages of Sleep](#)Sleep stages are divided into non-rapid eye movement (non-REM) and rapid eye movement (REM).
3. [Facts About Dreaming](#)Dreams can be entertaining, disturbing, or downright bizarre. We all dream -- even if we don't remember it the next day. But why do we dream? And what do dreams mean, anyway?
4. [Do You Get Good Sleep?](#)This interactive assessment will help you assess your sleep habits and sleep quality, and provide tips for improving your night's rest.
5. [Keeping a Sleep Diary](#)Learn about your sleep patterns and habits by keeping a daily sleep diary. It may be key to helping you and your health care provider diagnose and treat a sleep disorder.
6. [Sleep Tracker](#)An easy way to track your sleep habits and spot patterns.

## SLEEP APNEA

**Sleep apnea** is a serious **sleep disorder** that occurs when a person's breathing is interrupted during **sleep**. People with untreated **sleep apnea** stop breathing repeatedly during their **sleep**, sometimes hundreds of times. This means the **brain** -- and the rest of the body -- may not get enough oxygen.

There are two **types of sleep apnea**:

- **Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)**: The more common of the two forms of apnea, it is caused by a blockage of the airway, usually when the soft tissue in the back of the throat collapses during sleep.
- **Central sleep apnea**: Unlike OSA, the airway is not blocked, but the **brain** fails to signal the muscles to breathe, due to instability in the respiratory control center.

### Am I at Risk for Sleep Apnea?

Sleep apnea can affect anyone at any age, even children. Risk factors for sleep apnea include:

- Being male
- Being **overweight**
- Being over age 40
- Having a large neck size (17 inches or greater in men and 16 inches or greater in women)
- Having large **tonsils**, a large **tongue**, or a small jaw bone
- Having a family history of sleep apnea
- Gastroesophageal reflux, or **GERD**
- Nasal obstruction due to a **deviated septum**, **allergies**, or **sinus** problems.

## INSOMNIA

**Insomnia** is a **sleep disorder** that is characterized by difficulty falling and/or staying asleep. People with **insomnia** have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty falling asleep
- Waking up often during the night and having trouble going back to **sleep**
- Waking up too early in the morning
- Feeling tired upon waking

### Types of Insomnia

There are two types of **insomnia**: primary **insomnia** and secondary insomnia.

- **Primary insomnia:** Primary insomnia means that a person is having **sleep** problems that are not directly associated with any other health condition or problem.
- **Secondary insomnia:** Secondary insomnia means that a person is having sleep problems because of something else, such as a health condition (like **asthma**, **depression**, **arthritis**, **cancer**, or **heartburn**); pain; **medication** they are taking; or a substance they are using (like alcohol).

### Acute vs. Chronic Insomnia

Insomnia also varies in how long it lasts and how often it occurs. It can be short-term (acute insomnia) or can last a long time (chronic insomnia). It can also come and go, with periods of time when a person has no sleep problems. Acute insomnia can last from one night to a few weeks. Insomnia is called chronic when a person has insomnia at least three nights a week for a month or longer.

### Causes of Insomnia

Causes of **acute insomnia** can include:

- Significant life stress (job loss or change, death of a loved one, divorce, moving)
- Illness
- Emotional or physical discomfort

- Environmental factors like noise, light, or extreme temperatures (hot or cold) that interfere with sleep
- Some medications (for example those used to treat [colds](#), [allergies](#), [depression](#), [high blood pressure](#), and [asthma](#)) may interfere with sleep
- Interferences in normal sleep schedule ([jet lag](#) or switching from a day to night shift, for example)

#### Causes of chronic insomnia include:

- [Depression](#) and/or [anxiety](#)
- Chronic stress
- Pain or discomfort at night

## RESTLESS LEG SYNDROME

[Restless legs syndrome](#) (RLS) is a disorder of the part of the [nervous system](#) that causes an urge to move the legs. Because it usually interferes with [sleep](#), it also is considered a [sleep disorder](#).

#### Symptoms of Restless Legs Syndrome

People with [restless legs syndrome](#) have uncomfortable sensations in their legs (and sometimes arms or other parts of the body) and an irresistible urge to move their legs to relieve the sensations. The condition causes an uncomfortable, "itchy," "pins and needles," or "creepy crawly" feeling in the legs. The sensations are usually worse at rest, especially when lying or sitting.

The severity of RLS symptoms ranges from mild to intolerable. Symptoms can come and go and severity can also vary. The symptoms are generally worse in the evening and at night. For some people, symptoms may cause severe nightly [sleep](#) disruption that can significantly impair their quality of life.

#### Who Gets Restless Legs Syndrome?

Restless legs syndrome may affect up to 10% of the U.S. population. It affects both sexes, but is more common in women and may begin at any age, even in young children. Most people who are affected severely are middle-aged or older.

RLS is often unrecognized or misdiagnosed. This is especially true if the symptoms are intermittent or mild. Once correctly diagnosed, RLS can often be treated successfully.

#### Causes of Restless Legs Syndrome

In most cases, doctors do not know the cause of restless legs syndrome; however, they suspect that genes play a role. Nearly half of people with RLS also have a family member with the condition.

Other factors associated with the development or worsening of restless legs syndrome include:

- **Chronic diseases.** Certain chronic diseases and medical conditions, including [iron deficiency](#), Parkinson's disease, [kidney failure](#), [diabetes](#), and [peripheral neuropathy](#) often include symptoms of RLS. Treating these conditions often gives some relief from RLS symptoms.
- **Medications.** Some types of medications, including antinausea drugs, antipsychotic drugs, some [antidepressants](#), and cold and [allergy](#) medications containing sedating [antihistamines](#), may worsen symptoms.
- **Pregnancy.** Some women experience RLS during pregnancy, especially in the last trimester. Symptoms usually go away within a month after delivery.

## SNORING

[Snoring](#) is a common condition that can affect anyone, although it occurs more frequently in men and people who are [overweight](#). Snoring has a tendency to worsen with age.

Occasional snoring is usually not very serious and is mostly a nuisance for your bed partner. However, if you are a habitual snorer, you not only disrupt the [sleep](#) patterns of those close to you, but you also impair your own [sleep](#) quality. Medical assistance is often needed for habitual snorers (and their loved ones) to get a good night's [sleep](#).

### What Causes Snoring?

Snoring occurs when the flow of air through the [mouth](#) and nose is physically obstructed. Air flow can be obstructed by a combination of factors, including:

- **Obstructed nasal airways:** Some people snore only during [allergy](#) seasons or when they have a [sinus infection](#). Deformities of the nose such as a [deviated septum](#) (a structural change in the wall that separates one nostril from the other) or [nasal polyps](#) can also cause obstruction.
- **Poor muscle tone in the throat and [tongue](#):** Throat and [tongue](#) muscles can be too relaxed, which allows them to collapse and fall back into the airway. This can result from deep sleep, alcohol consumption, and use of some sleeping pills. Normal aging causes further relaxation of these muscles.
- **Bulky throat tissue:** Being [overweight](#) can cause bulky throat tissue. Also, children with large [tonsils](#) and [adenoids](#) often snore.
- **Long soft palate and/or uvula:** A long soft palate or a long uvula (the dangling tissue in back of the [mouth](#)) can narrow the opening from the nose to the throat. When these structures vibrate and bump against one another the airway becomes obstructed, causing snoring.

### Health Risks Associated With Snoring

Habitual snorers can be at risk for serious health problems, including obstructive [sleep apnea](#). [Sleep apnea](#) creates several problems, including:

- **Long interruptions of breathing** (more than 10 seconds) during sleep caused by partial or total obstruction or blockage of the airway.
- **Frequent waking from sleep**, even though you may not realize it.
- **Light sleeping.** People with **obstructive sleep apnea** sleep lightly to try to keep their throat muscles tense enough to maintain airflow.
- **Strain on the heart.** Prolonged suffering from **obstructive sleep apnea** often results in higher **blood pressure** and may cause enlargement of the **heart**, with higher risks of **heart attack** and **stroke**.
- **Poor night's sleep.** This leads to drowsiness during the day and can interfere with your quality of life.
- **Low oxygen levels in the blood.** This can lead to constricted **blood** vessels in the **lungs** and eventually **pulmonary hypertension**.
- **Chronic headaches.**
- **Obesity.**
- **Daytime sleepiness and fatigue.**