



NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL

SLEEP DISORDERS CENTER



WHY MY CARDIOLOGIST CARES ABOUT MY SLEEP

Sleep is an essential part of overall cardiovascular health. We spend one-third of our life asleep. The physical problems we deal with daily do not just disappear while we sleep; they often take on a very different appearance. Some diseases may temporarily improve while we sleep, while others may worsen. Cardiovascular diseases, including high blood pressure, coronary artery disease, congestive heart failure, strokes and heart arrhythmias, have been found to be tightly linked to certain sleep disorders, in particular, obstructive sleep apnea.

Do you snore? Do you wake up a lot at night? Are you tired during the day? These are often, but not always, symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea. Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a condition where an individual periodically stops breathing during sleep due to the collapse of the walls of their throat (the same thing that causes snoring). Once asleep, our throat muscles relax and thus, the tissue collapses into the path of the air we breathe. Snoring is merely the sound of the vibration of that tissue due to this collapse. If this collapse is complete, no air can come in or out causing our oxygen levels to drop. When we struggle to breathe like this, our sleep is disrupted.

Equally important to disrupted sleep are the consequences of this process on our heart. With each event, our blood pressure goes up, our heart rate goes up and our heart goes to work in overtime. In affected individuals, this process occurs throughout the night, every night, for years and years, even if your bed partner has never witnessed it. Imagine someone holding a pillow over your face and suffocating you while you sleep, over and over again, every night of your adult life. Ten, twenty, thirty times an hour! The consequences of this problem as it relates to your heart are severe and, if present, need to be evaluated.

Your cardiologist looks at cardiovascular risk factors like blood pressure and cholesterol, addresses smoking cessation and examines your blood glucose levels if you are diabetic. Obstructive sleep apnea is now recognized as yet another modifiable cardiovascular risk factor that needs to be screened for appropriately. An appointment for a sleep study and/or a consultation at the Northside Hospital Sleep Disorders Center will ensure that this important risk factor is appropriately evaluated. For more information on the sleep study itself, please visit our website.



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northside.com/sleep