

Q: I snore every night and my spouse can't stand it. She is threatening to move down the hall! Is there anything I can do to fix this?

A: You are not alone. It is estimated that 80% of couples sleep in separate bedrooms because of the noise. Here's what I know: Snoring occurs when the tongue relaxes into the back of the throat, causing the airway to become smaller. It can be more than a nuisance, as it is often a red flag for a more serious medical problem called Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA). When OSA occurs, the muscles and tissues around the throat relax to block the airway altogether. Without oxygen to the brain, the body awakens for a gasp of air and the cycle repeats (anywhere from a few to 80 times an hour!).

Snoring and OSA are on the rise, mostly due to our ever-increasing obesity rate. Obesity is the most significant risk factor, though there are many others. By 2020 it is projected that one in five Americans will have OSA. Some of the side effects from snoring and OSA are more significant than the strain on your relationship such as: high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, heartburn, morning headaches, depression and chronic sleepiness (duh!). The outcome? These sleep disordered breathing problems affect your work performance, increase your chance of injury or illness, and heighten your risk of a traffic accident. Yep—it's time for you to get some help!

A "sleep study" will help you achieve an accurate diagnosis. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends the CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) device for more severe OSA. In mild OSA, or in cases where the CPAP is not tolerated, they recommend an oral device that opens the airway by positioning the lower jaw *forward*. Akin to the well-known CPR position, a forward positioned lower jaw prevents the airway from collapsing. Such an appliance can be a very tolerable and effective solution to your snoring problem as well.

As an aside, the proper treatment for TMJD (Temporal Mandible Joint Disorder) is just the opposite—a night-time appliance that allows the lower jaw to relax *back* into its centered true hinge position. Thus, patients who suffer from TMJ pain and dysfunction may be poor candidates for this jaw-advancing appliance. Once you have a diagnosis, encourage your physician and dentist to collaborate on a solution that is best for you....and your spouse! Good luck.