



Danger in Your Sleep

Leading to debilitating effects on day-to-day function and quality of life, Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome (OSAS) is a disorder that affects many adults even without their knowledge. OSAS is not completely understood and often goes undiagnosed even though it substantially affects risks for cardiovascular and metabolic diseases.

During normal sleep, muscles controlling the tongue and soft palate hold the upper airway open, allowing airflow through the nose or mouth. In contrast, with OSAS the upper airway collapses, causing repetitive obstructions of airflow. The reoccurring event of obstructed airflow may exceed 100 per hour throughout the night. Hypoxia, gasping to re-establish breathing and then arousals from sleep, can lead to excessive sleepiness during the day. Sleepy employees have more impaired function, increased mental and performance errors and more job-related accidents.

In a survey that included both U.S. and European communities, findings showed up to 30 percent of patients seeing the primary care doctors were at risk for OSAS. In the vast majority of cases, OSAS and cardiovascular disease risks found in OSAS patients are increased by the presence of obesity. Thus, obesity is the prime comorbidity for 70-80 percent of OSAS patients and up to 50 percent of the severity of OSAS may be explained by the presence of obesity. Left undiagnosed, over time the OSAS becomes more severe. The most recent evidence suggests that OSAS independently confers a three-fold increase in risk of cardiovascular event.

Behavioral techniques that may reduce snoring in mild OSAS include restricting alcohol and sedatives before bedtime because they can further relax the upper airway and contribute to the obstruction. Other treatment may include positional sleep training, positive airway pressure therapy through the nasal, surgical intervention and CPAP therapy. While adherence to using CPAP therapy is sometimes difficult, it has been shown to eliminate the cascade of apnea induced physiological events as well as reduce daytime sleepiness and daytime hypertension more many patients.

When choosing a Health Risk Assessment for your employees make sure to have questions on it regarding the amount of sleep an individual gets, fatigue during the day and any diagnosed sleeping disorders.

For assistance in addressing obesity and sleep apnea with your employees, contact Sharon Rateike, corporate wellness program coordinator at (920) 568-5244 or Sharon.Rateike@forthc.com.

