



## Sleep Apnea: Risks & Signs

A 2019 study<sup>7</sup> estimated that at least 730 million people suffer with sleep apnea globally. According to the Cleveland Clinic, sleep apnea is diagnosed “when you stop breathing for 10 seconds or longer — at least five times an hour — during sleep.”

Sleep apnea is a treatable condition. However, if left untreated it can pose significant health risks, including sudden cardiac death. For that reason, it is important to take risk factors seriously.

### Risk Factors for Sleep Apnea

**Weight.** While not perfect, the body mass index (BMI) is a quick way to assess your weight. Being overweight, defined as a BMI between 25-29.9, is linked to an increased risk for sleep apnea.

**Smoking.** Smoking is associated with increased pulmonary inflammation, which also increases the risk of developing sleep apnea.

**Neck Circumference.** A wide neck circumference, often accompanied by excess body weight, has been linked to a higher incidence of sleep apnea.

**Comorbidities.** Sleep apnea is common in the presence of other health conditions, such as congestive heart failure, hypertension, diabetes, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), and asthma.

**Male.** Men have a higher incidence of sleep apnea than women, and there have also been an increased number of cases reported in individuals undergoing female-to-male gender reassignment<sup>8</sup>.



### Signs of Sleep Apnea

**Snoring loudly.** Loud snoring is one of the most common signs of sleep apnea, and sleepless partners are often the first to detect it.

**Gasping or choking during sleep.** While gasping during sleep is also tied to other medical conditions, such as acid reflux and post-nasal drip, it is also a common sign of sleep apnea.

**Morning headaches.** Prolonged bouts of oxygen deprivation can cause headaches, especially in the morning.

---

*If you are concerned that you might have some risk factors or signs of sleep apnea, schedule an appointment with your doctor as soon as possible. A referral to a sleep specialist may be necessary.*

---

7. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600\(19\)30198-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-2600(19)30198-5)

8. <https://aasm.org/rising-prevalence-of-sleep-apnea-in-u-s-threatens-public-health/>

9. <https://doi.org/10.5664/jcsm.8010>