

Does Snoring Affect Your Life?

Breathe better, sleep better with treatment from Dr. Fred R. Van Istendal, Jr., of Acorn Dental Sleep Medicine Centers.

by RUTH COHEN

The National Sleep Foundation estimates that sleep apnea affects one in 15 people: 18 million Americans. Up to 90 percent of these cases are undiagnosed because of a lack of awareness of the symptoms or lack of awareness of having them. Sleep apnea can cause a number of health issues, some of them critical, so it is important to determine whether or not this is something you are experiencing.

Dr. Fred R. Van Istendal, Jr. is a general dentist with Acorn Dental Sleep Medicine Centers, who has over 30 years of experience and understands the importance of a good night's sleep. He has seen many patients who are experiencing the ill-effects of sleep apnea. With his philosophy, "Who can we help today?" he and his staff strive to educate the public about sleep apnea and help individuals determine whether or not they are experiencing it. He is also one of the area's providers of an increasingly popular and successful method of treating sleep apnea with an oral appliance.

What is sleep apnea?

According to Dr. Van Istendal, sleep apnea, simply put, "is interrupted breathing during sleep. While you are sleeping, your tongue can cover your airway, causing you to stop breathing for short periods of time. This reduces the amount of oxygen flowing to your brain and body."



This reduction of oxygen can cause many problems, including cardiac issues, diabetes, feeling like you never get a full night's sleep, and many other maladies that can affect your daily functioning. Those who experience sleep apnea might find they wake up gasping for air during the night, or have partners who complain about their snoring. Individuals may have excessive daytime sleepiness, wake with a dry mouth, sore throat or headache, or experience attention problems, moodiness and irritability.

Sleep apnea is a generalized problem. It can range from very mild and undetected to severe. Dr. Van Istendal explains, "It can occur at any age, though it occurs much less in teens and more as you age. There are numerous factors that can contribute to the occurrence of sleep apnea, such as a person's weight and physical stature."

How is it treated?

Traditionally, sleep apnea has not been treated by dentists, as it is a medical issue. The "gold standard" of treatment consists of wearing a CPAP device during sleep. This device works by delivering air under pressure through a small mask that is held on to your head by straps while you sleep. The mask is connected by a hose to a small machine that blows pressurized room air into your airway, forcing your airway to remain open throughout the night. As you might expect, many people find the CPAP device difficult to adjust to, despite knowing how important wearing it consistently is.

Fortunately, there is an alternative that is less cumbersome and has a high success rate. "Working in conjunction with your medical doctor, I can customize an oral sleep appliance, similar to a sports mouth guard, which moves your jaw and tongue forward slightly when you sleep, so that your airway remains open and you can breathe and sleep better," says Dr. VanIstendal.



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How do I know if I have sleep apnea?

Dr. Van Istendal does an exam, takes pictures and measurements of the mouth and throat, determines the patient's BMI (Body Mass Index), observes the patient's physical state, and talks to the patient about their sleep history and other medical issues they may be expecting. If this information indicates that the patient may be experiencing sleep apnea, Dr. Van Istendal shares his findings with the patient's physician. Dr. Van Istendal works with medical physicians to facilitate a diagnosis and determine the best course of treatment.

What if I have sleep apnea?

Once your doctor and Dr. Van Istendal have identified you as a sleep apnea candidate, your physician will order a sleep study. "If the patient's sleep study results indicate that sleep apnea is an issue, the patient's physician can write a prescription for an oral appliance," Dr. Van Istendal explains.

"Once I have that prescription, I will meet with you to measure you for the appliance. Once I've made the appliance, you will come back in to learn how to insert it. Any adjustments that need to be made can be made at this point." Once you have been wearing your oral appliance for two or three months, another sleep study will be ordered to determine whether or not the oral appliance is successful and if any adjustments need to be made to increase the success of the treatment. Dr. Van Istendal follows up with each oral appliance patient every six months for the first two years, and then once a year after that.

Is it as good as it sounds?

"I have had patients who had been banished to other rooms to sleep. They've come back in and told me that they are back in their original bedroom because their snoring has been reduced to a gentle purr or nothing at all," says Dr. Van Istendal. "Most patients, after having the appliance for a week or two, report that they feel more rested [and] are not tired during the day; they don't nod off when they are bored, they feel more refreshed in the morning and throughout the day, and they find that their level of sleep is better, deeper and more comfortable."

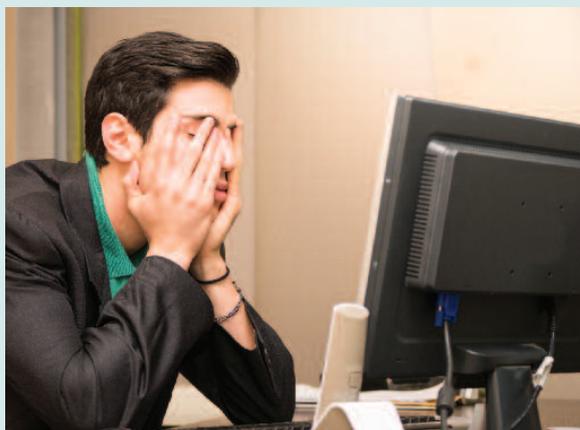
While the CPAP machine remains the "gold standard" for treatment of sleep apnea, and has been found to be slightly more effective than an oral appliance, many patients are relieved to know there is an alternative—one that is far more comfortable and easy to use.

Because they know how important a good night's sleep and a steady flow of oxygen to the brain and body during sleep are, Dr. Van Istendal and his caring and compassionate staff want everyone to be informed about sleep apnea: to understand what sleep apnea is, how detrimental it can be to a person's overall health, and that there are options available to correct it.

He explains, "I would like folks to be able to answer the questions, 'Do I have it?' and 'Do I have anything that causes me to think I might have sleep apnea?' For patients already using a CPAP, I would like for them to be aware that there is an alternative that could provide a more comfortable solution and bring them to better overall health, if they are unable to use the CPAP machine."

Dr. Van Istendal and his staff say that the first step towards better sleep and better health involves calling the office for a free sleep apnea evaluation, exam and consultation. Dr. Van Istendal also performs a wide range of dental services including cosmetic, restorative and orthodontics. Please call Acorn Dental Sleep Medicine Centers at (856) 452-0853.

The red carpet is out for you.



How to Spot Sleep Apnea:

- Choking or gasping at night
- Sore/dry throat upon waking
- Morning headaches
- Loud snoring
- Tired all day
- Forgetfulness
- ED (men)
- Decreased libido (women)