

# Can snoring be fatal?

by Dr. Ronald Perkins



Can snoring be fatal? Absolutely, when sleep apnea is involved. Could you be in danger? Ask yourself or your sleep partner these questions. Do you snore? Are you tired or irritable during

the day? Do you doze off while watching TV, reading, or performing daily activities? Does your snoring awaken your bed partner? Have you or your bed partner observed that you stop breathing

or gasp for breath while sleeping? Do you have some or all of these unhealthy symptoms listed in this article? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions you may have a sleep disorder.

Don't let this lead to the worst symptom of all—a heart attack! Many heart attacks could be prevented if those people affected with sleep apnea would get help. Sleep apnea in children can often be treated by simply removing tonsils and adenoids, which are obstructing the airways. However, adults present with a more complicated problem where the back of the tongue is occluding the airway. Over time, people who have this problem suffer the consequences. These people are often asked to sleep in remote areas when others are around, or to not sleep with someone who cannot tolerate their loud and erratic noises. Eventually, many symptoms begin to evolve.

### What causes snoring?

Snoring occurs when the jaw opens and the tongue falls into the back of the throat, causing the airway to narrow and forcing air through the smaller opening. This creates sound vibrations in the throat known as snoring. Snoring and sleep apnea may cause chronic sleepiness, strokes, heart attacks, high cholesterol, fibromyalgia, heartburn, depression,



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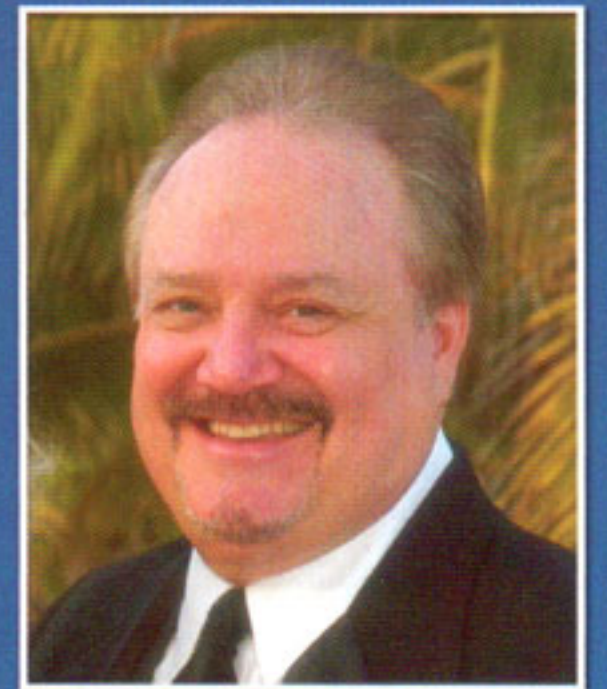
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**What is obstructive sleep apnea?**

Obstructive sleep apnea occurs when the airway completely collapses blocking airflow into the lungs. The harder one tries to breathe, the tighter the airway seals. This airway obstruction persists until the brain partially awakens the person. Unconsciously, he/she will close the jaw returning the tongue and throat to a normal position.

The cycle of falling asleep—jaw relaxing, airway collapsing, unconsciously awakening with a gasp, falling back asleep—can repeat itself up to one time per minute or more in severe cases. With a blocked airway, one does not receive enough oxygen and this can trigger both minor and serious health problems.

Research shows that 74% of American adults experience sleeping problems a few nights a week or more; and more than one in three (37%) are so sleepy during the day that their sleepiness interferes with their activities. One of the leading reasons and highest contributing factors to poor sleep is sleep disorder breathing, which includes

snoring and sleep apnea. One third of the older adult population snores, and snoring is four times more common in men than women. The quality of your sleep affects your daily activities and has a huge impact on the overall quality of your life. If you are not getting enough quality sleep during the night then you and your body may suffer.

This may affect your productivity and performance at work; increase your risk of injury or illness; cause strain in personal relationships; be a sign of a more serious problem called obstructive sleep apnea.

Loud snoring can destroy relationships. The good news is these problems can be treated with a simple oral appliance. The TAP appliance is a custom fitted mouthpiece that holds the jaw forward allowing the airway to stay open. The procedure involved in getting started consists of an initial visit to a local dental office that specializes in sleep apnea with oral appliance treatment. Impressions will be taken of your teeth to create your own custom trays. Wearing this appliance at night while you sleep will reduce, or in most

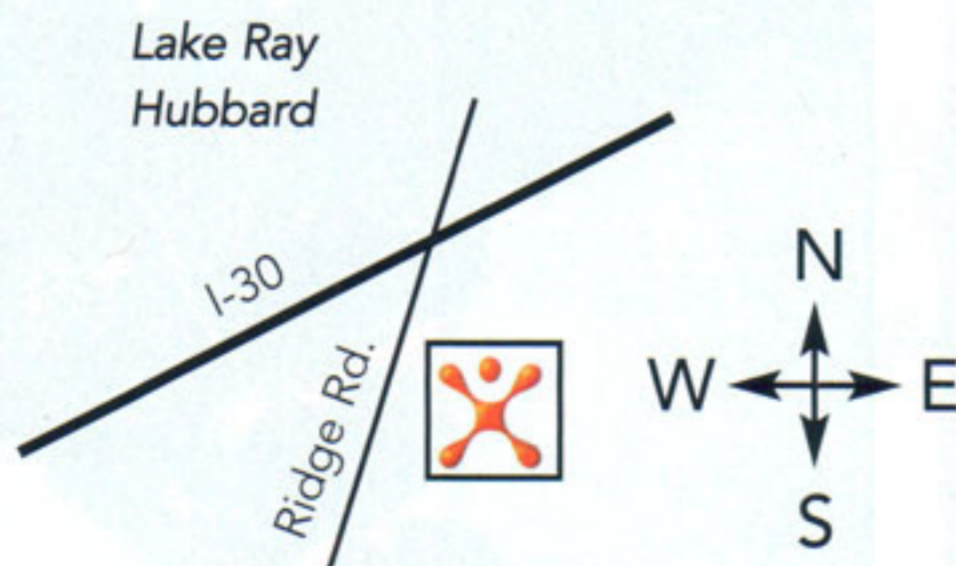
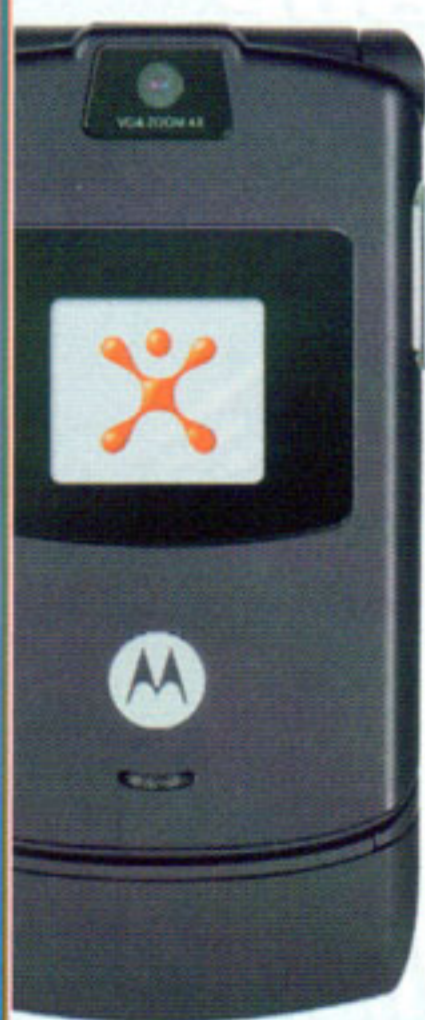
cases eliminate, all of your troubling symptoms. The newly redesigned appliance with posterior support eliminates some of the side effects and will dramatically improve the comfort level of wearing this appliance. Due to these improvements, many patients with TMD (jaw joint dysfunction) and bruxism have been helped with this treatment.

Other suggested treatments can involve surgery of the throat or a CPAP device. Surgery can result in several weeks of a very painful recovery period and results can often be unsuccessful. The CPAP involves wearing a mask over the nose and forces the airway to open with air pressure. Most people have a difficult time using this device.

If you or someone you know has several of the aforementioned symptoms, why not see a dental professional and try a non-invasive, non-surgical approach to this problem? Getting help could save your life or the life of someone you love. I know how well this appliance works, because I wear one myself! ❖

*Ron Perkins, D.D.S., M.S.D., is the practicing orthodontist at Team Perkins Orthodontics.*

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