

Snoring—No Laughing Matter

Loud snoring on a nightly basis is nothing to joke about. Chances are snoring frequently disturbs your sleep as well as the sleep of others in the household, who, because of their interrupted sleep, may be prone to feeling sleepy during the day. But more importantly, while most snoring is harmless, loud and continuous snoring may be a warning sign for a serious and even life-threatening sleep disorder called obstructive sleep apnea, particularly when accompanied by noticeable daytime sleepiness or waking up feeling unrefreshed. One of the most disturbing symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea is excessive sleepiness while driving, which is particularly dangerous for commercial drivers.

According to the National Sleep Foundation's (NSF) 2005 *Sleep in America* poll, about one-third (32 percent) of America's adults report snoring at least a few nights a week, with about one fourth (24 percent) indicating they snore almost every night. For commercial drivers, if their snoring is a symptom of sleep apnea, treatment can be a life-saver.

It is estimated that as many as 18 million Americans have sleep apnea. It appears that commercial truck and motorcoach drivers might be at higher risk of having this disorder. A study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania and sponsored by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and the American Transportation Research Institute of the American Trucking Associations found that almost one-third (28 percent) of commercial truck drivers had some degree of sleep apnea.¹ The study found that the risk of having sleep apnea depended on two major factors, age and degree of obesity, with prevalence increasing with both.

Sleep apnea is characterized by pauses in breathing that prevent air from flowing into or out of a sleeping person's airways. Obesity and a large neck can contribute to the sleep disorder. People with sleep apnea awaken frequently during the night gasping for breath. The breathing pauses reduce blood oxygen levels, can strain the heart and cardiovascular system, and increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, including high blood pressure, heart attack, and stroke. While those who snore may not be aware of their awakenings, the resulting interrupted sleep can lead to excessive daytime sleepiness. This, in turn, can cause symptoms of depression, irritability, learning and memory difficulties, and falling asleep in situations demanding alertness, such as while driving.

Reference

1. Pack AI, Dinges DF, & Maislin G. (2002). A study of prevalence of sleep apnea among commercial truck drivers. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (Publication No. DOT-RT-02-030). Washington DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, FMCSA.

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