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Risk Factors of Sleep Apnea

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Sleep apnea is a sleep disorder that affects millions of people in the United States alone. There are two main types of this condition, obstructive sleep apnea and central sleep apnea. The most common is obstructive sleep apnea, with about ninety percent of the cases falling into this category. As the name implies, something is obstructing the airway during sleep, causing breathing to become very shallow or actually cut off completely. Central sleep apnea is when the brain just forgets to send a signal to the proper muscles to breathe.

Some of the signs you might be suffering from this condition include waking up in the middle of the night choking or gasping, or waking up with a headache in the morning or still feeling tired. Waking up irritable or grouchy is another sign that you could have this condition. Finding yourself feeling tired in the middle of the day may also be an indication that something is interrupting your sleep at night. Ironically, many people who suffer with sleep apnea don't even know they have it.

Let's take a look at some of the risk factors of sleep apnea and the reasons why they might present a problem.

* Being overweight or obese - Being overweight could obstruct your airway, particularly during sleep, due to extra tissue or fat deposits.

* Age - Being above 65 years of age increases the chance you'll suffer from sleep apnea by a factor of two to three.

* Smoking - Smoking increases inflammation and also the chance you retain fluid in your throat area. Both these conditions could cause your airway to become constricted.

* Gender - Sleep apnea is twice as likely to occur in males than females.

* Heredity - Your family history may play a role in whether or not you'll develop sleep apnea.

* High Blood Pressure - Sleep apnea is more prevalent in individuals who have high blood pressure.

Sleep apnea can lead to serious medical conditions, and yet most people either cannot believe they have it, or refuse to do anything about it. It's estimated that 80 - 90 percent of the people who have sleep apnea do not even realize it. Sleep apnea cannot be diagnosed during a routine doctor's visit, and there's no blood test to detect it.

Studies have shown that sleep apnea, if left untreated, can increase the risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, and elevated cholesterol levels. It can also play a role in diabetes and weight gain.

If you suspect you have sleep apnea, speak to your health care professional about it. Your doctor should be able to tell if you are at risk for sleep apnea by performing a physical exam of your throat and neck area, and also by asking a series of questions about your medical and family history. Your doctor may order a sleep study, which monitors what happens with your breathing during sleep and is the most accurate test for sleep apnea.

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