

Dr. Peterson

Is there a relationship between sleep apnea and narcolepsy?

There is no known direct relationship between sleep apnea and narcolepsy. However, it *is* possible for someone to have more than one sleep disorder at a time. In particular, the fact that sleep apnea affects so many people means that some people with the relatively rare condition of narcolepsy will also have sleep apnea.

What causes one to get cramps in their leg at night?

In most cases, these painful night leg cramps are harmless and may happen for no known reason. Sometimes they can be prevented by gently and carefully stretching the muscles before getting into bed. However, there are certain disorders or conditions that can predispose an individual to night leg cramps. These include dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, Addison's disease, cirrhosis, type 2 diabetes, hypothyroidism, kidney failure, Parkinson's disease, peripheral artery disease and second trimester pregnancy. You should talk to your doctor if the leg cramps are severe or persistent, significantly inhibit your ability to sleep, or cause muscle weakness or atrophy.

Once a patient is diagnosed with sleep apnea and goes on a CPAP machine, will there be a time in their future that they will be able to stop using the machine?

Currently, CPAP is the most effective, non-surgical treatment option for individuals with moderate-to-severe sleep apnea. For over-weight patients, weight loss is helpful for many reasons, including reducing the severity of untreated sleep apnea. However, research studies have shown that even after weight loss achieved through "bariatric" surgery involving the stomach, most patients still need to use CPAP. This means the vast majority of people must remain on the CPAP machine until something better comes along.

Do you have any data to support the use of an oral appliance (such as a dental guard) in patients with mild to moderate sleep apnea?

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends dental devices for patients with mild-to-moderate sleep apnea who are not appropriate candidates for CPAP, or for patients who cannot tolerate CPAP. Dental devices have also been shown to offer better long-term control of sleep apnea when compared to uvulopalatopharyngoplasty, the standard surgical treatment. There are several different dental devices available, including the mandibular advancement device and tongue retraining device. In all cases, these devices should be fitted by a trained dental professional.

I can only stay asleep for 5-6 hours a night. Could this cause heart problems?

Possibly. A 2008 study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* showed that individuals who slept less than seven and a half hours a night were two-thirds more likely to have a heart attack or stroke over a four-year period. The reasons for this association are not entirely understood. However, these risks increase for

people who don't experience a normal drop in blood pressure overnight – many of whom may be experiencing night-time elevations of blood pressure due to sleep apnea.