



The serious side of sleeplessness

*The Sleep Center can help
put your sleep problems to rest*

For years, Jack Conway suffered from undiagnosed sleep apnea, a condition in which one actually stops breathing while sleeping due to partial or full airway collapse. Since the body is being deprived of oxygen, a person unknowingly wakes up throughout the night in

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order to get air. As a result, people with apnea don't sleep restfully.

Conway also has congestive heart failure, a condition made worse by the apnea. "Sleep apnea restricts oxygen intake and increases carbon dioxide levels, which contributes to arterial constriction and increased blood pressure," explains Mitchell Saltzberg, M.D., a cardiologist at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital and medical director of the Heart Failure Program at Midwest Heart Specialists. "All of these can make any pre-existing heart condition worse."

Sleep apnea affects more than 12 million Americans, according to the National Institutes of Health. Risk factors include being male, overweight and over the age of 40, but it can strike anyone at any age, even children.

Conway's condition affected his entire life. "My temper was out of control," he says. "I would fall asleep at work. I felt so miserable most of time I didn't want to go anywhere socially." His wife, Melanie, whom he describes as "a saint," also suffered from his loud snoring and constant awakening.

Based on his doctor's referral, Conway spent the night in a sleep lab while staff observed and monitored his heart rate and oxygen intake. He also was videotaped so a physician could analyze his sleep pattern.


The study pointed clearly to sleep apnea. "Jack was waking up, or arousing, about 86 times an hour," says clinical manager

Carolyn Campo. "As with many of our patients, he wasn't even aware of it." He then received advanced treatment at the Sleep Center at Good Samaritan Hospital.

Getting some rest

Conway was prescribed a common treatment called continuous positive airway pressure. This treatment uses splints to keep airways open while pressurized air is delivered to the patient. The machine works for about 70 percent of patients with sleep apnea; the remaining 30 percent, like Conway, need further help through the use of a face mask.

In addition, Conway was advised to get regular exercise and eat a healthier diet, both important to staying healthy and maintaining a healthy weight.

"Since treatment, my life has improved dramatically," Conway says. "I finally wake up feeling refreshed and ready to start the day." 

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