

Unsound Sleep

Prof Dr Primuharsa shares why snoring may affect more than just your partner's sleep.



Although awareness of sleep apnoea is on the rise, Dr Primuharsa believes that much more can be done in educating the public on the problems that this condition may lead to.

SNORING has always been a problem, especially when it comes to relationships – disrupting the pattern of your partner's sleep and shattering the peace of the bedroom. However, most people fail to acknowledge the fact that snoring may also be a sign of other problems such as sleep apnoea. Aware of this situation, Prof Dr Primuharsa Putra Bin Sabir Husin Athar, a Consultant Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) – Head & Neck Surgeon in **KPJ Seremban Specialist Hospital** and Clinical Professor of ORL-HNS at KPJ Healthcare University College speaks to *Care for Life* about this sleep disorder.

NOT JUST SNORING

People sometimes confuse sleep apnoea with simply snoring. But as Prof Dr Primuharsa elaborated, “Snoring is just the noisy breathing sound caused by the vibration of your airway during sleep. Sleep apnoea is more than just snoring. You actually stop breathing while sleeping. With that being said, almost all cases of sleep apnoea include snoring.”

Those suffering from sleep apnoea will have difficulty in breathing as the walls of the throat close up during sleep, blocking the airway. This can cause the brain to react automatically and wake you up in order to clear the blockage and breathe normally again. However, as you drift back to sleep, the throat muscles again collapse, and the cycle continues. “Because all of this happens subconsciously, most people never realise that they have this problem – until they are informed by their partners of their waking up at night,” Prof Dr Primuharsa clarified.

This condition may be caused by various things. Sometimes there is an irregularity in the structure of the airway such as in those who have a thick neck, deviated septum or receding chin. Other underlying medical conditions such as tonsillitis, nasal polyps, enlarged tonsils or adenoids could also be the cause for sleep apnoea. “Obesity can be a contributing factor, as fat deposits may increase the collapsibility of the upper airway during sleep,” added Prof Dr Primuharsa.

AFFECT ON HEALTH

Medically, sleep apnoea may contribute to the development of high blood pressure, heart problems, and even stroke. Apart from health conditions, this problem may also affect sufferers socially. It would prevent them from enjoying deep sleep, and affect their everyday life, causing them to feel lethargic and sleepy all the time. In more extreme cases, sleep apnoea may also cause depression or lead to bouts of ill-temper for no apparent reason. According to the doctor, “All of this, plus all the snoring will definitely affect one's personal life, especially when it comes to relationships as there is research that shows sleep apnoea and snoring may be contributing factors in divorce.”

SLEEPING BETTER

For sleep apnoea patients, the most obvious treatment is to treat the underlying medical condition causing the apnoea, and this usually involves surgery. For those not desiring this, the Continuous Positive Airflow Pressure (CPAP) may be a viable option. It is a mask-like device that keeps your breathing passages open while you sleep by providing a constant stream of air. “However, this treatment is usually more expensive, and having to wear the mask every time you want to sleep is

probably why this method is not very popular,” Prof Dr Primuharsa explained.

Although awareness of sleep apnoea is increasing, there are still many people who believe that snoring and sleep problems are things that are common and do not need much attention. Dr Primuharsa begged to differ. He concluded, “If you feel that you have problems sleeping, or your partner complains about your snoring or the fact that you stopped breathing during sleep, it is strongly advisable for you to seek proper medical help.”

FAST FACTS

With his expertise in Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT), Prof Dr Primuharsa Putra has a wealth of experience. Some of the highlights in his career include:

- 1991 - Doctor of Medicine, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
- 2000 - Masters of Surgery in Otorhinolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery, UKM
- 2001-2005 - Senior Lecturer and Consultant, Department of Otorhinolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery, Faculty of Medicine, UKM
- 2005-present - Resident Consultant, ENT - Head & Neck Surgeon, KPJ Seremban Specialist Hospital
- 2006 - Fellow, International Academy of Oral Oncology (IAOO)
- 2010-2012 - Member, KPJ Group Clinical Risk Management Committee (CRMC)
- 2012 - Fellowship of the Academy of Medicine Malaysia (FAMM)
- 2012-2013 - President, Malaysian Society of Otorhinolaryngologists - Head & Neck Surgeons (MSO-HNS)
- 2013-present - Board Member, Asian Society of Head & Neck Oncology (ASHNO) Governing Council
- 2013-present - Member, KPJ Group Clinical Governance Action Committee (CGAC)
- 2013-present - Clinical Professor, ORL-HNS, KPJ Healthcare University College (KPJUC)