

# Snoring and obstructive sleep apnoea in children

When we breathe in, air travels down the airway to the lungs, where oxygen passes into the bloodstream. Blood then transports the oxygen throughout the body.

## **Snoring and obstructive sleep apnoea**

When we are asleep our muscles relax. The relaxed muscles in our throat causes narrowing of the upper airway. When we breathe through this narrowed space we can make the sound we know as snoring. This is normal and doesn't usually cause any problems.

However, in some people, the relaxed muscles can obstruct the upper airway. When this happens, breathing pauses, known as apnoea.

This causes a drop in the oxygen levels in the blood, which stimulates the brain to increase breathing. The person briefly wakes up and restarts breathing, with a gasp or snort before falling back to sleep.

This can happen many times throughout the night. It affects the quality of sleep and (in very severe cases) it can put a strain on the heart and lungs.

This is known as obstructive sleep apnoea, or OSA.

## Symptoms

Snoring is the most common symptom of OSA. Other symptoms can include:

- Sleeping in an unusual position to help breathing.
- Daytime sleepiness caused by frequent apnoeic episodes reducing quality of sleep.
- Behavioural issues caused by sleep deprivation, such as tiredness, irritability, headaches, reduced appetite or lack of concentration.
- Poor growth and weight gain, as children tend to grow when they are asleep.

## Diagnosis

There are 3 ways we can diagnose OSA.

### **Parent feedback**

A parent's account of a child's sleeping and behaviour can be key to making a diagnosis. A video of the child sleeping and of any suspected apnoea episodes can be particularly helpful.

### **Examination**

We can examine your child's throat.

### **Sleep Study**

In some cases, we will do a sleep study. This involves observing the child overnight whilst they sleep and monitoring their heart and breathing rates and their oxygen levels.

## Treatment for OSA

Children with simple snoring, or very mild OSA, often require no treatment. For those with more severe symptoms the treatment is tailored to the individual child and the underlying cause of their OSA.

### Surgery

The most common treatment is surgery to remove the tonsils and/or adenoids. This is known as an adenotonsillectomy. It is a relatively minor procedure, which takes about 30 minutes, and is very successful at reducing the symptoms of OSA. You can read more in our leaflet called **Your child's tonsil surgery** which is on our website, or you can ask a member of staff for a copy.

### Airway support

In some cases where removing the tonsils and adenoids is not recommended, airway support can be used. This involves the child wearing a mask over the nose at night, whilst a ventilator machine provides positive pressure to keep the airway open. This is known as CPAP or BiPAP therapy.

### Other treatments

In some specific cases other treatment options can be recommended. This can include nasal steroids to reduce any inflammation of the nasal airway passages, or an exercise and nutritional programme for children who are overweight.

## **Evelina London Medicines Helpline**

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's medicines, please speak to the staff caring for them or contact our helpline, **phone** 020 7188 3003, Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm

## **Your comments and concerns**

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), **phone** 020 7188 8801 **email** [gstt.pals-gstt@nhs.net](mailto:gstt.pals-gstt@nhs.net) To make a complaint contact the resolution department **phone** 020 7188 3514 **email** [gstt.complaints-publicfolder@nhs.net](mailto:gstt.complaints-publicfolder@nhs.net)

## **Language and accessible support services**

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please contact the service your child is seeing.

## **NHS 111**

This service offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day, **phone** 111 **web** [www.111.nhs.uk](http://www.111.nhs.uk)

## **NHS website**

This website gives information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing, **web** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch, **phone** 0800 731 0319

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