

Sleep-Disordered Breathing May Cause Atherosclerosis



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We spend approximately one-third of our lives asleep. When we sleep our body recovers from the day's work and events. Sleep is a time for regeneration, repair and healing. Unfortunately, not everyone has a perfect sleep. Sleep disorders, such as insomnia, restless leg syndrome, narcolepsy and sleep-disordered breathing are increasingly common in our society. Sleep disorders not only interfere with our sleep, they also put us at risk for more serious health complications. Despite the prevalence of sleep disorders, sleep habits and sleep-related symptoms are frequently overlooked by most clinicians.

Sleep-disordered breathing is a branch of sleep disorders that ranges from snoring to the more severe sleep apnea. Sleep apnea and snoring are obstructive disorders that result from a narrowing of the upper respiratory airway. Sleep apnea is characterized by repeated episodes of partial or complete cessation of breathing during sleep. Snoring is the noise made during sleep when the sleeper attempts to force air through an obstruction in the upper respiratory airway (imagine a broken muffler). Both disorders tend to be associated with age and obesity.

Sleep apnea has been shown to be a significant risk factor for cardiovascular disease. It has been associated with hypertension, coronary artery disease and cerebrovascular disease. A recent study has shown that sleep apnea may predispose people to atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis is the progressive narrowing and hardening of the arteries over time and is characterized by the presence of plaques on the inner walls of the arteries.

A study was conducted at the Cerrahpasa Faculty of Medicine, Istanbul University in Turkey on the effect of sleep-disordered breathing and atherosclerosis. A total of 114 male patients (aged 40 to 65 years) with a history of snoring and disturbed sleep were studied.

Subjects were divided into three groups based on their prevalent condition: habitual snoring, mild to moderate sleep apnea and severe obstructive sleep apnea syndrome. Through ultrasound, atherosclerosis was assessed in all subjects using a measurement of the inner lining of the arteries and the presence of plaques. The researchers found that subjects in the obstructive sleep apnea group had significantly greater thickness in the arterial lining compared with the habitual snoring group. The researchers also found a correlation between the number of respiratory disturbances (breathing cessation) and plaque formation. The study also found that atherosclerosis worsened with age and body mass index. The researchers concluded that sleep apnea is a predisposing factor for atherosclerosis.

Sleep apnea is a serious health concern, particularly when compounded with a predisposition for atherosclerosis. Some of the risks factors for sleep apnea, however, can be successfully treated. If you are overweight, you can reduce your risk for developing sleep apnea by losing weight. Sign up for a weight loss plan such as the Truestar Weight Loss Program, and start today! Speak to your licensed health care professional and see what options are available to you for treatment of your sleep apnea.