

## Sleep and Driving Safety



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Many of us battle our way to work every morning behind the wheel of a car. We have to watch out for the weather, traffic accidents, the cars all around us and even objects in the middle of the road. Have you considered that you should also be making sure you've had a good night's sleep?

#### A good night's sleep

In a perfect world, every one of us would sleep deeply each night. Unfortunately, many people have sleeping disorders such as insomnia, obstructive sleep apnea or snoring. Of these sleeping disorders, sleep apnea and snoring are often most concerning as they are associated with an increased risk of heart disease and stroke.

#### Obstructive sleep apnea and snoring

Obstructive sleep apnea is a condition characterized by a temporary stoppage of breathing during sleep, often resulting in daytime sleepiness. Snoring is a vibration of the uvula and soft palate of the throat due to air being forced through a narrowed passage. Both obstructive sleep apnea and snoring have been linked to an increased risk for traffic accidents.

#### Traffic accidents

A study was published in the journal *Respiratory Medicine* on the relationship between the rate of traffic accidents and patients with sleep apnea or snoring. One hundred and eighty nine patients with sleep apnea or snoring were studied and another 40 non-snoring patients were used as a control group. Patients were diagnosed with sleep apnea and snoring based on polysomnography (a test that simultaneously and continuously monitors relevant normal and abnormal physiological activity during sleep) and a self-answered questionnaire.

Patients with sleep apnea reported a higher number of traffic accidents and reported driving off the road more than the control group. Patients attributed their accidents and off-road events mostly to daytime sleepiness and work schedule. The researchers concluded that sleep apnea, and to a lesser extent snoring, were associated with an increased risk of traffic accidents.

#### Driving simulation

Another study was published in the journal *Thorax* on the driving ability of patients with sleep apnea using a simple computer driving simulator. One hundred and fifty patients with sleep apnea performed a 20-minute driving simulation. The researchers found there was a relationship between poor driving ability and patients with sleep apnea.

#### Sleep apnea and snoring solutions

In many cases, sleep apnea and snoring can be improved through weight loss, eating healthy and exercise. In other cases, sleep apnea may require the use of a special breathing machine (CPAP) or even surgery.