

# Leduc Representative



July 18, 2008

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## Help available to improve your sleep

Bill Glen  
 news@leducrep.com  
 Friday July 11, 2008

Did you know that recent research shows one in four Canadians is sleep deprived? While sleep deprivation can be caused by snoring, stress or other factors, it may be the result of something more serious.

Sleep Disordered Breathing (SDB) is manifested in snoring, but it is often undiagnosed sleep apnea.

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, sleep disordered breathing is an important public health problem. Without adequate high quality sleep, people cannot function effectively at home, at work or in the community. A variety of side effects can occur.

Sleep apnea is the most common of the syndromes described as sleep disordered breathing. It is characterized by episodes of pauses in breathing lasting from 10 to 30 seconds during sleep which sometimes recur hundreds of times a night.

With each episode, the brain briefly rouses the sleeper to resume breathing, resulting in a fragmented, poor quality sleep.

The most common form of SDB is obstructive sleep apnea. In this form, episodes occur due to a collapse of soft tissue in the back of the throat that closes off the airway.

The blockage can be the result of relaxed throat muscles, a narrow airway, a large tongue or extra fatty tissue in the throat.

A common method of treating sleep apnea is the CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) mask and machine. While reliable, the appliance can be somewhat noisy and uncomfortable.

Dr. David Merrell is a specialist in dental sleep medicine, who has been treating SDB sufferers for more than 15 years using oral sleep appliance therapy.

He entered the field after his father was diagnosed with sleep apnea.

"Sixty per cent of the adult population snore, but now we're finding out more from medical research, how it impacts people's lives. It's not just a sound anymore to forget about," said Merrell, who recently opened an office in Edmonton.

"About 20 per cent of children have impaired sleep breathing."

SDB not only affects the person who snores, but also on a bed partner, if there is one.

"A recent survey stated that 66 per cent of Canadians said they have a partner who snores and causes them to have disrupted sleep. Without the deep REM sleep, your body is not getting the restorative biochemical changes that it needs to heal and be healthy," he said.

"There are obvious symptoms like insomnia and sleepiness. But we now know there are many other conditions linked to SDB, such as acid reflux, unexplained weight gain, soar throats and recurring headaches. Sometimes people wake up choking or gasping, or they wake up feeling warm or perspiring. With SDB, the body unconsciously starts to breathe heavier to try and overcome any limited flow or actual apneas."

Merrell's treatment for those with SDB includes nasal and mandible X-rays, teeth moulds, computer simulations and a consultation with a sleep specialist. He then makes a custom fitted, adjustable orthodontic appliance that uses principles of CPR.

"The appliance pulls the jaw forward and elongates the airway, making it easier to breathe," he said.

Merrell estimated that 1,000 patients have been fitted with the appliance, with a 90 per cent success rate.

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He said the appliance is perfect for airline pilots and railway engineers, for example, who require annual examinations for sleeping disorders.  
"We're just scratching the surface with dental sleep medicine."  
For more information, call Dr. David Merrell at (780) 424-SNOR (7667).

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