



**Tossing and turning all night? Waking up groggy and tired? If you answered yes, you may be among the millions of Americans who experience sleep problems. Often your bedmate notices the problem first, which means that no one is getting a good night's sleep.**

Although sleep disorders are very common, few people realize that they can be treated.

"Sleepiness may negatively impact job performance or lead to on-the-job injuries," says Benjamin Kanter, M.D., a board-certified pulmonologist and medical director of the Palomar Medical Center Sleep Disorders Laboratory. This facility is North County's only in-hospital sleep lab. It specializes in evaluating and treating patients with breathing-related sleep disorders and is certified by the American Sleep Disorders Association.

"Identifying the cause of chronic sleepiness is important in determining the proper treatment," says Dr. Kanter. "Causes include obstructive sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome and reduced hormone levels during and after menopause."

## Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) occurs when a person stops breathing repeatedly for more than 10 seconds or experiences very shallow breathing during sleep. This can occur hundreds of times a night and is due to a blocked airway. It is more common in men than women and is linked to increased body weight and persons with short, thick necks. Most people with OSA snore and may appear to be choking in their sleep. They may also experience morning headaches, forgetfulness and mood changes.

"Since OSA may increase your risk of high blood pressure, stroke, heart failure or getting into a traffic accident, it is critical to diagnose the problem during overnight evaluations at the sleep lab," says Dr. Kanter.

The PPH Sleep Lab evaluation includes a test that records the patient's brain activity, eye movements, muscle activity, heart and respiratory rate, airflow and blood oxygen levels during sleep. A sleep technician records the number of times the patient's breathing was impaired and scores a grade based on the severity of the sleep apnea.

In mild cases of OSA, physicians recommend weight loss through exercise and healthy diet, avoiding alcohol and sleeping pills, and changing sleep positions. The majority of patients are treated with continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP), using a bedside machine about the size of a 12-

pack of sodas. It gently blows air into the patient's custom-fitted nasal mask to relieve the obstruction.

"Patients often experience dramatic improvement with even one night's treatment," says Dr. Kanter. "They tell me they feel more alert and in general are less irritable, happier and more social. Over time, they perform better at work or during daily activities and lower their blood pressure."

## Restless Leg Syndrome

Up to 10 percent of the U.S. population experiences Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS), which is an overwhelming urge to move your legs as you try to fall asleep. Sometimes, these tingling, creeping, cramping or painful sensations and jerking movements in your calves can even wake you up.

RLS is considered a neurological condition and is often made worse by stress, pregnancy, anemia, kidney problems, diabetes, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder or rheumatoid arthritis. Typically, RLS affects older adults and women.

To determine if you have RLS, your doctor should do a full physical and neurological exam and ask questions regarding your family history and sleep patterns. RLS is often misdiagnosed since there is no specific lab test to diagnose it. While there is no known cure for RLS, it is generally treated with prescription medications or pain relievers.

Stretching, walking, rubbing or exercising your leg muscles may help to reduce the nighttime sensations. Limiting alcohol and caffeine may also help. Learn more about RLS during a special class on Wednesday, January 18 at OASIS. See page 10 for details.

## Sleep Problems from Menopause

For approximately 40 percent of menopausal women, hot flashes and night sweats keep them from sleeping soundly. These sleep problems are thought to be associated with hormonal function and also with psychological factors.

More women are opting out of using hormone replacement therapy (HRT) since a 2002 landmark study from the Women's Health Initiative Study showed HRT actually increases women's risk of heart attacks, breast cancer, stroke and blood clots, rather than offering protection as was previously thought. Most physicians believe that low dose HRT is safe for short periods of time – four to five years – depending on your personal health, family history and risk factors.

Consult with your physician about alternatives to HRT. Some women find that herbs, such as black cohosh, and soy help with hot flashes. Others find that wearing loose clothing to bed, keeping their bedroom cool and well ventilated and avoiding spicy foods may also help.

If you have trouble sleeping for more than a few weeks, or if sleep problems interfere with daily functioning, speak with your doctor. For more information, call the Palomar Medical Center Sleep Disorders Laboratory at 760.739.3685.

## Common Causes of Sleep Disorders

- Physical or medical conditions (ulcers, heartburn, chronic pain)
- Depression, anxiety disorders
- Light, noise, extreme temperatures
- Alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, some medications
- Life stresses
- Family history
- Aging
- Night shift work