

Living with a Snoring Partner

Practical Survival Tips

It is estimated that 25% of the population's sleep is disturbed by a partner who snores. In my practice I see a lot of couples whose relationship has been strained by this problem. The issues associated with snoring are complex and in this article I will present a practical approach to dealing with this problem.

Snoring and sleep apnea.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a sleep disorder that is characterised by intermittent, partial or complete upper airway obstruction during sleep. OSA is suspected when individuals present with loud snoring and excessive daytime sleepiness. People who have gained weight, particularly around the neck, are susceptible to developing OSA. It is estimated that 24% of males and 9 % of women in the age group of 30 to 65 years have OSA. OSA produces significant increases in light sleep (stage 1) and a significant decrease in slow wave sleep or restorative sleep (stages 3 and 4) and REM sleep. In most cases, people with OSA are unaware that their sleep is disturbed but never the less present with symptoms. Some of the symptoms associated with obstructive sleep apnea are;

- Snoring as reported by a partner
- Frequent waking during the night
- Getting up to urinate numerous times (4 or more times) during the night
- Waking in the morning with a dry mouth or headache
- Excessive sleepiness during the day, particularly when sitting down for long periods.

The best way to check if you or your partner has OSA is to see your GP and organise a sleep study. The sleep study is painless and can be conducted at a specialist sleep centre often located in a hospital. Alternatively you can undertake a home sleep study. If OSA is confirmed, the most common treatment is either weight loss or a CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) machine. When OSA is properly treated, snoring is no longer a problem. Not all snoring is associated with OSA, but it is worthwhile checking out because if left untreated it can lead to hypertension and heart disease.

Simple techniques to use with a snoring partner

- **Tennis ball taped to the back:** Because most people snore when lying in their back and not on their side, strapping a tennis ball to their back might provide a useful solution.
- **Ear plugs:** Obvious solution but often they don't make a dint in the sound that a snorer can make. (I did have one client who worn noise cancelling head phones to bed and she swore by them. When asked, how did she sleep on her side with head phones she confessed to sleeping comfortably on her back all night. Not for everyone!
- **Top and Tail with ear plugs:** Try moving down to the foot of the bed so your face is closer to your partner's feet. This technique will give you some distance from the source of the snoring and the ear plugs may become more effective. Although a popular technique, it does come with certain safety and health concerns particularly if your partner suffers from periodic limb movement (kicks during the night) or has questionable foot hygiene.

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- **Go to bed before your snoring partner:** This works for many people particularly if their problem is trying to fall asleep while their partner is snoring. If you tend to fall asleep quickly and stay asleep for most of the night then going to bed before your partner might be a solution for you. If having sex is part of your bed time routine, you may want to schedule this earlier in the evening.
- **Make clicking sound.** Do you remember when you were a child and pretended you were riding a horse? You probably added a clicking sound out of the corner of your mouth to simulate the sound of the horse's feet. That same sound has been found to stop a person snoring for a short period of time. It may give you just enough time to fall asleep before the snoring starts up again.
- **Moving to another room** (the ultimate solution!).

This solution is often the most practical for dealing with a snoring partner, however, for many couples it can be problematic. Many people hold the belief that couples should always sleep together no matter what and that to leave the shared bed in the middle of the night is the wrong thing to do. If you feel that the best solution for you is to move to another room during the night but feel conflicted by this belief, an open and honest dialogue may help to facilitate the transition.

Here are some alternative arguments you may want to consider:

- Your sleep belongs to you. Although you may feel comfortable and secure going to sleep with someone, once you are asleep it is just you and your dreams.
- You need your sleep to function effectively during the day. Most adults need between 7-8 hours sleep per night. When sleep is fractured and constantly interrupted during the night for more than two nights it can cause irritability, poor concentration and affect memory during the day. Sleep disturbance for two weeks or more can produce clinically diagnosed insomnia which is difficult to treat and can put more stress on the relationship.
- Moving out of the bed room during the night does not necessarily mean you no longer care about your relationship.

Generally there are two approaches you can use once you have negotiated this with your partner. Move into another room while the snoring continues and come together when the mood takes you or go to bed together and then move to another room during the night if you wake and are unable to go back to sleep.

I hope this tip sheet is useful. If you have anything you would like to add to this sheet or have any questions about snoring or sleep generally feel free to email me at frank@sleepwithconfidence.com.au and I'll try to respond to you as soon as I can.

Good luck