

Six things I learned since being diagnosed with sleep apnea

It's been about six months since I learned that I have sleep apnea – a sleep disorder that causes me to stop breathing throughout the night that can be deadly or cause long-term health issues.

I recently wrote about the **causes and diagnosis of it** and thought I'd share the things I've learned about the disorder since being diagnosed.



1. CPAP machines are the most effective initial and long-term treatment – CPAP stands for Continuous Positive Airway Pressure and is what most physicians will use to treat someone diagnosed with sleep apnea. It's an amazing machine that provides initial pressure through a mask to open your airways and increases the pressure when you have an apnea. My CPAP came with a humidifier and it is lightweight to take with you when you travel. My life was miserable without it – I would wake up with head ringing several times a night. I was also having low oxygen levels during my sleep test, so the machine is literally saving my life.

My CPAP machine even came with an iPhone app that allows me to track my results to include duration, how good my mask seal is, the number of apneas I'm having per hour and more.



2. In most causes sleep apnea is curable by losing some weight – if you are obese or even just a little overweight and snore, you should talk to your doctor about sleep apnea, especially if you wake up with headaches and feel tired during the day. Gaining weight can cause your airways to get blocked while you sleep thus the apneas. Losing weight is considered the best way to cure your sleep apnea and preferable to surgery.

3. Surgery should be considered a last resort– in some cases, sleep apnea can be caused by a blockage in your airways. Surgery can help, but there are dangers to removing tissue from your throat. My doctor reported that surgery was 50% effective with her patients – half of those that decided on surgery had long-term adverse issues like trouble with swallowing. The risk-reward of surgery can be dramatic so my doctor suggested surgery be a last resort. A CPAP machine, losing weight, a dental mouthpiece and even acupuncture should be considered first before considering surgery.

4. Dentists have some success with treating sleep apnea –

through my research I've learned that dentists can produce a mouthpiece that can keep your airways open while you sleep. If you fall asleep easily and nothing seems to bother you,



it's something to consider. For me, sleeping with a mouthpiece isn't my first choice as I'm a light sleeper. It's something I will strongly consider if losing weight doesn't resolve my sleep apnea.

5. Sleeping on your side is best for people with sleep apnea –

every health care professional that I talked to from doctors to acupuncturists told me to sleep on my side. When you sleep on your back your tongue and head position can restrict your airway. It can be the main reason someone even has sleep apnea.

Consider sleeping on your side with a pillow to your back and/or one near your chest. Manufacturers even sell pillows specifically designed to help with sleeping on your side. I find sleeping on my side with a CPAP machine has helped significantly reduce my apneas. I've gone from 40+ per hour to 4-6 per hour, which is considered normal.

6. Finding the perfect mask can take time, but it is critical for those with a CPAP –

I went through three different categories of masks before I found the one for me. I started off with a nasal-only style mask and when that didn't work out for me I switched to a partial-mask (nearly a full mask), but it turned out I was more of a mouth breather when sleeping. Finally, I settled on a full mask that covers both my mouth and nose. The key is don't settle for the first mask you try. Once you find the perfect mask, you'll find yourself having a better night's rest.

Have sleep apnea and tips to share? Post them in the comment section!

*This article is sponsored by **Cape Medical Supply** – New England's premiere provider of sleep therapy service and orthopedic bracing solutions*



Resources

- WebMD – Sleep Apnea
 - American Sleep Apnea Association
 - Mayo Clinic – Sleep Apnea
-