

Star Wars and Obstructive Sleep Apnea Part One

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What do Star Wars and obstructive sleep apnea have in common? The relationship and influence of one seemingly small part of the system to the whole! Here the comparison is between Star Wars character, Jabba-the-Hut, to the human tongue.

In Stars Wars, Jabba-the-Hut is described in the following way, “Jabba the Hutt was one of the galaxy’s most powerful gangsters, with far-reaching influence in both politics and the criminal underworld. There were no second chances with Jabba, something Han Solo would find out – -- though the slug-like alien would ultimately fall victim to his own hubris and vengeful ways.”

Since your tongue structurally controls your airway, thus airflow that allows for breathing, it has the greatest influence upon your ability to survive, as validated by the A-B-C priority sequence of CPR which begins with ensuring airway patency. Therefore, it is the most immediate influencer upon our body’s reaction to threat of death which is the fight or flight response, commonly referred to as the stress response.

Physiological or biological stress is an organism's reaction to a stressor as an unanticipated stimulus. The body reacts to a survival challenge utilizing stress, adrenaline type hormones. The body's way to respond to these threats is through the sympathetic nervous system activation which results in the fight-or-flight, referred to as the stress response. The body cannot remain in this state for long periods of time; afterwards the parasympathetic system returns the body's physiological conditions to normal. In humans, stress typically describes a positive or a negative attribute that can have an impact on a person's mental and physical well-being.

Just like Jabba, the tongue is with us round the clock not just while we are asleep. Ignoring this is perilous as it results in erroneous conclusions of what we are filtering through our observations. An obvious example of this is concluding that a tonsillectomy in a of children with large tonsils diagnosed with ADHD and obstructive sleep apnea resulting in reversal of the ADHD behavior and, therefore, diagnosis because they are getting a better night’s sleep, with no recognition of the daytime impact. Failure to consider the awakened state impact is a scientific travesty of ignoring reality!

The next article will elaborate on this further and explore some anatomic similarities of Jabba to that of the human tongue and how, the ignoring the details of a complex relationship that exists in this leads down a blind alley in understanding of both Jabba and the human body.