

Understanding Your Sleep Apnea Condition

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In my consultations with patients seeking treatment for impaired oral function, often manifested in symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), I have the opportunity to review with them their medical history, which includes their prior diagnoses and treatments. Too many times, these patients fall into one of two categories.

One group has not consulted with a physician “qualified” in sleep apnea either before or after a polysomnogram or sleep study. And, it sometimes appears that no one has fully explained the condition to them or made them aware that there are different treatment options, depending on the severity of their OSA. Having this type of a conversation with a qualified doctor is usually covered by insurance.

The feedback I usually receive from these patients is that they were referred by their family physician directly to a sleep laboratory for an overnight sleep study conducted by technicians, then fitted, either the same night, or at a second study, on a subsequent night, with a nasal continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine that pumps air through their nose down their throat and into their lungs at a pressure, determined during the study, to manage the sleep apnea condition. If the technicians find that the CPAP works during the study, one is then dispensed and fitted to the patient, usually by a third party equipment supplier.

The second group has been referred to, and has seen a sleep disorders specialist, who recommends nasal CPAP for all patients, regardless of the characteristics and severity of their condition.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) 2005 Practice Parameters for the Treatment of Snoring and Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) with Oral Appliances essentially states that oral appliances are considered on equal footing with nasal CPAP in the treatment of mild to moderate OSA. For severe sleep apnea nasal CPAP treatment is indicated first and if the patient is unable or unwilling to utilize CPAP an oral appliance should be considered next.

The AASM states, regarding the “parameters”, that they expect these “guidelines to have an impact upon professional behavior, patient outcomes and, possibly, health care costs”. As a reader of Your Health Magazine, you are demonstrating a proactive interest in improving your own health care. You choose and interact with professionals to assist you. This information is intended to help you in your process.

If you snore, or demonstrate symptoms of OSA, there are options, which you can proactively look into to find the best solution for you.