



Snoring

Tips to Help You and Your Partner Sleep Better



Just about everyone snores occasionally, and it's usually not something to worry about. But if you regularly snore at night, it can disrupt the quality of your sleep—leading to daytime fatigue, irritability, and increased health problems. And if your snoring keeps your partner awake, it can create major relationship problems too. Thankfully, sleeping in separate bedrooms isn't the only remedy for snoring. There are many effective solutions that can help both you and your partner sleep better at night and overcome the relationship problems caused when one person snores.

What causes snoring?

Snoring happens when you can't move air freely through your nose and throat during sleep. This makes the surrounding tissues vibrate, which produces the familiar snoring sound. People who snore often have too much throat and nasal tissue or “floppy” tissue that is more prone to vibrate. The position of your tongue can also get in the way of smooth breathing.

Since people snore for different reasons, it's important to understand the causes behind your snoring. Once you understand why you snore, you can find the right solutions to a quieter, deeper sleep—for both you and your partner.

Common causes of snoring

Age. As you reach middle age and beyond, your throat becomes narrower, and the muscle tone in your throat decreases. While you can't do anything about growing older, lifestyle changes, new bedtime routines, and throat exercises can all help to prevent snoring.

Being overweight or out of shape. Fatty tissue and poor muscle tone contribute to snoring. Even if you're not overweight in general, carrying excess weight just around your neck or throat can cause snoring. Exercising and [losing weight](/articles/diets/how-to-lose-weight-and-keep-it-off.htm) (/articles/diets/how-to-lose-weight-and-keep-it-off.htm) can sometimes be all it takes to end your snoring.

The way you're built. Men have narrower air passages than women and are more likely to snore. A narrow throat, a cleft palate, enlarged adenoids, and other physical attributes that contribute to snoring are often hereditary. Again, while you have no control over your build or gender, you can control your snoring with the right lifestyle changes, bedtime routines, and throat exercises.

Nasal and sinus problems. Blocked airways or a stuffy nose make inhalation difficult and create a vacuum in the throat, leading to snoring.

Alcohol, smoking, and medications. Alcohol intake, smoking, and certain medications, such as tranquilizers like lorazepam (Ativan) and diazepam (Valium), can increase muscle relaxation leading to more snoring.

Sleep posture. Sleeping flat on your back causes the flesh of your throat to relax and block the airway. Changing your sleep position can help.

Ruling out more serious causes

Snoring could indicate sleep apnea, a serious sleep disorder where your breathing is briefly interrupted many times each night. Normal snoring doesn't interfere with the quality of your sleep as much as sleep apnea, so if you're suffering from extreme fatigue and sleepiness during the day, it could be an indication of [sleep apnea](/articles/sleep/sleep-apnea.htm) (/articles/sleep/sleep-apnea.htm) or another sleep-related breathing problem. Call your doctor if you or your sleep partner have noticed any of the following red flags:

- You snore loudly and heavily and are tired during the day.
- You stop breathing, gasp, or choke during sleep.
- You fall asleep at inappropriate times, such as during a conversation or a meal.

Linking the cause of your snoring to the cure

Monitoring your snoring for patterns can often help you pinpoint the reasons why you snore, what makes it worse, and how to go about stopping. To identify important patterns, it helps to keep a [sleep diary](/misc/sleep-diary.pdf) (/misc/sleep-diary.pdf). If you have a sleep partner, they can help you fill it in. If you sleep alone, set up a camera to record yourself at night.

HOW you snore reveals WHY you snore

Type of snoring	What it may indicate
Closed-mouth snoring	May indicate a problem with your tongue
Open-mouth snoring	May be related to the tissues in your throat
Snoring when sleeping on your back	Probably mild snoring—improved sleep habits (/articles/sleep/getting-better-sleep.htm) and lifestyle changes may be effective cures
Snoring in <i>all</i> sleep positions	Can mean your snoring is more severe and may require a more comprehensive treatment

Self-help strategies for snoring

There are so many bizarre anti-snoring devices available on the market today, with more being added all the time, that finding the right solution for your snoring can seem like a daunting task. Unfortunately, many of these devices are not backed up by research, or they work by simply keeping you awake at night. There are, however, plenty of proven techniques that can help eliminate snoring. Not every remedy is right for every person, though, so putting a stop to your snoring may require patience, lifestyle changes, and a willingness to experiment with different solutions.

Bedtime remedies to help you stop snoring

Change your sleeping position. Elevating your head four inches may ease breathing and encourage your tongue and jaw to move forward. There are specifically designed pillows available to help prevent snoring by making sure your neck muscles are not crimped.

Sleep on your side instead of your back. Try attaching a tennis ball to the back of a pajama top or T-shirt (you can sew a sock to the back of your top then put a tennis ball inside). If you roll over onto your back, the discomfort of the tennis ball will cause you to turn back onto your side. Alternatively, wedge a pillow stuffed with tennis balls behind your back. After a while, sleeping on your side will become a habit and you can dispense with the tennis balls.

Try an anti-snoring mouth appliance. These devices, which resemble an athlete's mouth guard, help open your airway by bringing your lower jaw and/or your tongue forward during sleep. While a dentist-made appliance can be expensive, cheaper do-it-yourself kits are also available.

Clear nasal passages. If you have a stuffy nose, rinse sinuses with saline before bed. Using a neti pot, nasal decongestant, or nasal strips can also help you breathe more easily while sleeping. If you have allergies, reduce dust mites and pet dander in your bedroom or use an allergy medication.

Keep bedroom air moist. Dry air can irritate membranes in the nose and throat, so if swollen nasal tissues are the problem, a humidifier may help.

Lifestyle changes to help you stop snoring

Lose weight. (</articles/diets/how-to-lose-weight-and-keep-it-off.htm>) Losing even a little bit of weight can reduce fatty tissue in the back of the throat and decrease, or even stop, snoring.

Quit smoking. (</articles/addictions/how-to-quit-smoking.htm>) If you smoke, your chances of snoring are high. Smoking irritates the membranes in the nose and throat which can block the airways and cause snoring. While quitting is easier said than done, it can bring quick snoring relief.

Avoid alcohol, sleeping pills, and sedatives because they relax the muscles in the throat and interfere with breathing. Also talk to your doctor about any prescription medications you're taking, as some encourage a deeper level of sleep which can make snoring worse.

Be careful what you eat before bed. Research shows that eating large meals or consuming certain foods such as dairy or soymilk right before bedtime can make snoring worse.

Exercise (</articles/healthy-living/how-to-start-exercising-and-stick-to-it.htm>) in general can reduce snoring, even if it doesn't lead to weight loss. That's because when you tone various muscles in your body, such as your arms, legs, and abs, this leads to toning the muscles in your throat, which in turn can lead to less snoring. There are also specific exercises you can do to strengthen the muscles in your throat.

Six anti-snoring throat exercises

Studies show that by pronouncing certain vowel sounds and curling the tongue in specific ways, muscles in the upper respiratory tract are strengthened and therefore reduce snoring. The following exercises can help

1. Repeat each vowel (a-e-i-o-u) out loud for three minutes a few times a day.
2. Place the tip of your tongue behind your top front teeth. Slide your tongue backwards for three minutes a day.
3. Close your mouth and purse your lips. Hold for 30 seconds.
4. With your mouth open, move your jaw to the right and hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the left side.
5. With your mouth open, contract the muscle at the back of your throat repeatedly for 30 seconds. Tip: Look in the mirror to see the uvula ("the hanging ball") move up and down.
6. For a more fun exercise, simply spend time singing. Singing can increase muscle control in the throat and soft palate, reducing snoring caused by lax muscles.

Medical treatment for snoring

If you've tried self-help solutions for snoring without success, don't give up hope. There are medical options that could make all the difference. New advances in the treatment of snoring are being made all the time and devices are becoming more effective and comfortable.

Talk to your primary physician or to an otolaryngologist (ear, nose, and throat doctor or ENT). Even if they recommend something that in the past was uncomfortable or didn't work, that doesn't mean the same will be true now.

Medical cures for snoring

Your physician or otolaryngologist may recommend a medical device or surgical procedure such as:

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP). To keep your airway open during sleep, a machine at your bedside blows pressurized air into a mask that you wear over your nose or face.

Laser-assisted uvulopalatoplasty (LAUP) uses a laser to shorten the uvula (the hanging soft tissue at the back of the throat) and to make small cuts in the soft palate either side. As the cuts heal, the surrounding tissues stiffen to prevent the vibrations that trigger snoring.

Palatal implants or the Pillar procedure involves inserting small plastic implants into the soft palate which help prevent collapse of the soft palate that can cause snoring.

Somnoplasty uses low levels of radiofrequency heat to remove tissues of the uvula and soft palate that vibrate during snoring. The procedure is performed under local anesthesia and takes about 30 minutes.

Custom-fitted dental devices and lower jaw-positioners help open your airway by bringing your lower jaw or your tongue forward during sleep. For best results, you will need to see a dentist who specializes in these devices.

Surgical procedures such as Uvulopalatopharyngoplasty (UPPP), Thermal Ablation Palatoplasty (TAP), tonsillectomy, and adenoidectomy, increase the size of your airway by surgically removing tissues or correcting abnormalities.

Snoring and your relationship

No matter how much you love each other, snoring can put a strain on your relationship. If you're the one lying awake at night as your partner snores away, it's easy to start feeling resentful. And if you're the snorer, you may feel helpless, guilty, or even irritated with your partner for harping on about something you can't control.

When snoring is a problem, relationship tension can grow in the following ways:

Sleeping in separate rooms. While this may be a solution for some couples, it can also take a toll on emotional and physical intimacy. And if you're the one snoring, you might feel lonely, isolated, and unfairly punished.

Irritability due to sleep loss. Disrupted sleep isn't just a problem for the non-snorer. Snoring is caused by disordered breathing, which means the snorer's sleep quality also suffers. Poor sleep takes a toll on mood, thinking skills, judgment, and your ability to manage stress and conflict. This can explain why communication often breaks down when you and your partner try talking about the problem.

Partner resentment. When a non-snorer feels he or she has done everything possible to sleep through the night (ear plugs, sound machines, etc.) but the snorer does nothing to combat the snoring, it can lead to resentment. Working as a team to find a snoring cure can prevent future fights.

If you value your relationship, make it your priority to find a snoring cure so you can both sleep soundly. Working together to stop snoring can even be an opportunity to improve the quality of your bond and become more deeply connected.

Communicating with a partner who snores

So, you love everything about your partner... except their snoring. It's normal. Even the most patient amongst us will draw the line at sleep deprivation. But no matter how much sleep you lose due to someone snoring, it's important to handle the problem sensitively. It's common to be irritable when sleep loss is an issue, but try reining in your frustration. You want to attack the snoring problem—not your sleep partner. Remember that your partner likely feels vulnerable, defensive, and even a little embarrassed about their snoring.

Time your talk carefully. Avoid middle of the night or early morning discussions when you're both feeling exhausted.

Keep in mind it's not intentional. Although it's easy to feel like a victim when you lose sleep, remember that your partner isn't keeping you awake on purpose.

Avoid lashing out. Sure, sleep deprivation is aggravating and can be damaging to your health, but try your best to approach the problem in a non-confrontational way.

Beware of bitterness. Make sure that latching onto snoring is not an outlet for other hidden resentments you're harboring.

Use humor and playfulness to bring up the subject of snoring without hurting your partner's feelings. [Laughing about it](/articles/relationships-communication/managing-conflicts-with-humor.htm) (/articles/relationships-communication/managing-conflicts-with-humor.htm) can ease tension. Just make sure it doesn't turn into too much teasing.

Dealing with complaints about your snoring

It's common to be caught off guard—not to mention to feel a little hurt—when a partner complains about your snoring. After all, you probably didn't even realize it was happening. And although it might seem silly that snoring can cause such relationship turmoil, it's a common and a very real problem.

If you dismiss your partner's concerns and refuse to try to solve your snoring problem, you're sending a clear message to your partner that you don't care about their needs. This could mean your relationship is in trouble, and that's a bigger problem than the snoring.

Keep the following in mind as you and your partner work together to find a solution to your snoring:

Snoring is a physical issue. It's nothing to be embarrassed about. Like a pulled muscle or a common cold, improving the condition is in your hands.

Avoid taking it personally. Try not to take your partner's frustration as a personal critique or attack. Your partner loves you, just not the snoring.

Take your partner seriously. Avoid minimizing complaints. Lack of sleep is a health hazard and can make your partner feel miserable all day.

Make it clear that you prioritize the relationship. If you and your partner have this understanding, you'll both do what it takes to find a cure for the snoring.

Address inappropriate behavior. Although sleep deprivation can lead to moodiness and irritability, let your partner know that it's not okay for them to throw an elbow jab or snap at you when you're snoring.

More help for sleep

[Sleep Apnea: \(/articles/sleep/sleep-apnea.htm\)](/articles/sleep/sleep-apnea.htm) Symptoms, Self-Help, and Treatment Alternatives

[Sleep Disorders and Problems: \(/articles/sleep/sleep-disorders-and-problems.htm\)](/articles/sleep/sleep-disorders-and-problems.htm) Symptoms, Treatment, and Self-Help

[Sleeping Well: \(/articles/sleep/getting-better-sleep.htm\)](/articles/sleep/getting-better-sleep.htm) How to Create Habits that Help You Sleep Better

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