Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Sleep Apnea

This information explains what sleep apnea is. It also describes what to do before and after your surgery at MSK if you have sleep apnea.

About sleep apnea

Sleep apnea is a common breathing disorder. It causes you to stop breathing for short periods of time when you're sleeping.

The most common type of sleep apnea is obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). With OSA, your airway becomes completely blocked while you're asleep. OSA can be a serious risk for death after surgery.

Common symptoms of OSA

Please tell us if you have any of the symptoms below. These can be signs of sleep apnea.

- Loud snoring. For example, snoring that's louder than talking or that others can hear through closed doors.
- Sleepiness during the day. For example, falling asleep while reading an email or during a conversation.
- Fatigue. Fatigue is feeling very tired or having little energy.

Keeping you safe during surgery

Sleep apnea can cause serious problems during and after surgery. We'll do things before, during, and after your surgery to keep you safe.

- During your presurgical testing (PST) appointment, a nurse practitioner (NP) will ask you questions to see if you may have sleep apnea. These questions

include:

  - Do you snore loudly?
  - Do you often feel tired, fatigued, or sleepy during the day?
  - Has anyone seen you stop breathing while you were asleep?
  - Do you have high blood pressure? Are you being treated for high blood pressure?
- During and after your surgery, we'll put a special clip on your finger if we know you're at risk for sleep apnea or have sleep apnea. The clip will measure the oxygen in your blood. It will sound an alarm if you aren't getting enough oxygen.
- After your surgery, we'll change the way we give you pain medication. Certain pain medications can make sleep apnea much worse. You'll still get pain medication to keep you comfortable and manage your pain.
- We'll make sure your healthcare providers know you're at risk for sleep apnea or have sleep apnea.

Sleep apnea and your health

Sleep apnea can cause many problems.

- Sleep apnea can make you sleepy during the day and increase your risk of accidents from:
  - Driving while sleepy
  - Falling asleep while working
- Snoring strains your heart, lungs, and blood vessels. This can lead to:
  - Diabetes
  - Serious heart problems
  - Serious lung problems
- Untreated OSA can lead to or worsen:
  - High blood pressure

- Heart failure
- Stroke
- Irregular heartbeat

We'll do everything we can to make sure you're safe while you're in the hospital. We hope you'll go a step further and talk with your local healthcare provider about how to treat your sleep apnea. We recommend asking them to refer you to a sleep center.

You can also contact a sleep center on your own. Treating your sleep apnea will help prevent serious health problems in the future.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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