Do Women Snore as Much as Men?

Stigma may prevent women from accurately reporting the prevalence and intensity of their snoring.

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The National Sleep Foundation defines snoring as noisy breathing during sleep, a condition that affects an estimated 90 million American adults, and men are particularly at risk for the problem. But new findings published in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine reveal that women underreport the prevalence and intensity of their snoring, reports the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

For the study, researchers assessed 1,913 patients who were referred to a sleep disorders center for evaluation. Scientists gave participants a questionnaire and asked individuals to rate the severity of their snoring and used a calibrated digital sound survey meter to quantify snoring volume objectively during a sleep study that lasted an entire night. Snoring intensity was classified as: mild (40 to 45 decibels), moderate (45 to 55 decibels), severe (55 to 60 decibels) or very severe (60 decibels or more).

Objectively measured snoring was reported in 88% of the women participants. But only 72% of women admitted to snoring. Of the women involved, 49% exhibited severe or very severe snoring, but only 40% rated their snoring on those levels.

Researchers also found that their objective snoring assessment rate for male participants (92.6%) was nearly the same as the rate of snoring the men self-reported (93.1%).

In addition, results showed that women snored just as loudly as men. Their mean maximal snoring intensity was 50 decibels while the mean intensity among men was 51.7 decibels.

Scientists believe that stigma prevents women from accurately reporting their snoring, which may be why obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is underdiagnosed among this population. (OSA is a chronic disease that causes the repeated collapse of the upper airway during sleep.)

Nimrod Maimon, MD, MHA, a professor at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Faculty of Health Sciences in Israel and principal investigator of the study, concluded that one way to combat this problem is for doctors to consider additional factors besides self-reported snoring when screening women for OSA. (For example, checking to see whether women reported experiencing daytime fatigue or tiredness.)

Click here to learn how snoring and sleep apnea are linked to greater risk for heart damage in women.

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