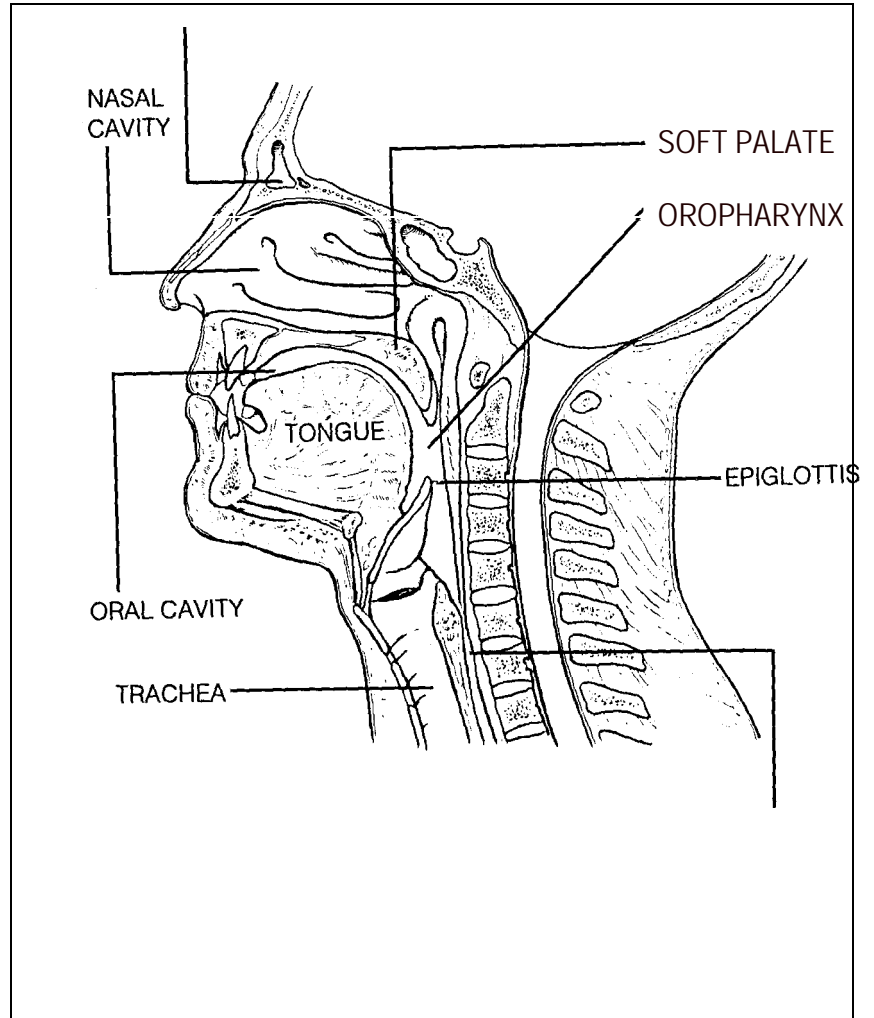


For millions of Americans, snoring is more than just a nuisance. In some cases, snoring is the early sign of a potentially fatal disorder called sleep apnea that eventually kills 30 to 40 percent of sufferers.

Sleep apnea often develops in heavy **snorers, both male and female, by the time they reach middle age**. It is a severe form of snoring caused by a collapse of the soft palate (or "roof" of the **mouth**), **tonsils and other throat structures into one or all** three of the airways between the mouth and lungs. In sleep apnea, collapsed airways completely cut off the snorer's oxygen supply. The deep, restful stages of sleep elude apnea sufferers, because they awaken each time their breath is cut short. In severe cases, the airways get blocked up to 300 times a night.

Recent studies show sleep apnea is far more common than experts previously thought. These breathing interruptions may strike up to 24 percent of middle-aged American men and 9 percent of middle-aged women.



Surgery Options

Surgery can also be performed to repair a bent septum in the nose, to remove polyps in the nose, or to open up a passageway for air so the person breathes easily.

Tracheotomy, where a breathing hole is placed in the neck, is used only in extreme cases of sleep apnea.

Who gets sleep apnea?

Men develop sleep apnea more than women. "We are not exactly sure why more men develop this sleep disorder more often," says Dr. Rosner. "Researchers suspect it is due to structural differences in the male palate, tongue and throat, but we do not know for sure."

Seeking Help

When should you see a doctor if a family member says you have a severe snoring problem?

"The best indicators of sleep apnea are pauses in breath of 15 seconds or longer," says Dr. Rosner. "You may suspect sleep apnea if you are tired during the day, have morning headaches, a dry throat or elevated blood pressure."

The most common form of surgery to cure sleep apnea is called uvulopalatopharyngoplasty (UPPP). This surgery removes the tonsils, a portion of the soft palate and the uvula (the flap of skin that dangles from the roof of the mouth into the throat). Removal of these structures widens the air passage to eliminate blockages, especially when a person lies down to sleep.

Rushel Dupree has missed out on some of life's greatest endings.

For more than five years, the **48-year-old father of two** never saw **the end of any movie he watched.** Long before the closing credits rolled on the TV screen in his **Rochester Hills family room,** **Rushel's teenage daughter, Renee,** would look up to see her father nodding off to sleep in his easy chair. At first, **Renee and Rushel's wife, Zenobia,** thought **Rushel's daytime sleepiness** was due to **long days on the job as a Chrysler Corporation regional sales manager.** Then the problem became more obvious. **Rushel started falling asleep just about every time he sat down in a comfortable chair - even in the middle of a conversation with Zenobia.** Dozing off during the day wasn't **Rushel's only sleeping trouble.** He was an unusually heavy snorer. "We closed the doors to all of our rooms every night because of the snoring," says Renee. **Rushel had a few problems at work, too. "It would get to be around 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and I'd be sleepy,"** he says. "I thought, `What's going on here? I got eight hours of sleep last night!'"

"They always listed the profile of a person with sleep apnea, and I realized that **Rushel was a typical case,**" says **Zenobia.** "The daytime sleepiness and the heavy snoring - he had every single one of the classic symptoms."

By the time he visited **Beaumont otolaryngologist Arthur Rosner, M.D.,** **Rushel had an advanced case** of sleep apnea. Testing concluded that his airway completely collapsed about 90 times an hour per night. Each time **Rushel approached the deep, essential stages of "quality" sleep, (called the Rapid Eye Movement stage or REM sleep),** a breathing interruption jarred him awake. **Dr. Rosner discussed treatment options with Rushel, including a surgical procedure called uvulopalatopharyngoplasty, or UPPP. The removal of his tonsils, uvula and a portion of the soft palate would help clear the airway and allow restful sleep. Combined with weight loss, Dr. Rosner told him, he had a 90 percent chance of eliminating sleep apnea.**

Rushel had never had surgery before, but decided it was the best option. "The most convincing fact was that I could eventually have heart trouble because of this problem, or even die," says Rushel. "Even if I didn't die in my sleep, I could have fallen asleep at the wheel of my car. **That really hit home.**"

Following the UPPP surgery, Rushel spent one night in the hospital and was off work recuperating for the following two weeks.

Since the May 1993 surgery, Rushel has shed **35 pounds to help further alleviate** airway blockages. "It's **not** a strict diet - I just eat more slowly, and I eat less," he says.

His new lifestyle is more active because he feels rested all the time, he says. "Being free of sleep apnea is like a breath of fresh air."

It's quieter around the Dupree household in the evenings now. Rushel catches all of the zzz's he **needs,** and **Zenobia is enjoying her new man.**

Last year, Dupree was diagnosed with sleep apnea, a disorder that causes interrupted breathing after a person falls asleep. This repeatedly jolts the sleeper awake throughout the night and often causes severe snoring. Dupree's condition was corrected through surgery that helped clear his airway. Today, Dupree, his wife, Zenobia, and teenage daughter, Renee, are all sleeping easier.

