

A good night's sleep has been a "dream" of mine for many years. I have had sleep apnea for a long time and it steadily became more severe as I aged and gained some weight. It got to the point that my son could hear me snoring in his room, 20 feet down the hall, through our closed bedroom door and his closed door. My wife had to prod me constantly during the night to stop snoring. But in the past year, the apnea became so pronounced that my wife noticed I actually stopped breathing several times a night and would prod me to make me breathe again. When I did finally take in a breath, it was with a very loud snore. I was getting up several times a night, perhaps 4 or 5 times, to urinate. It actually was my brain waking me up, because I wasn't getting enough oxygen, not a full bladder. In the morning, I was "dead" tired with no energy to get up and exercise so I gained some weight and spent a good portion of the day yawning and feeling sleepy. The cycle repeated itself nightly. The stoppage of breathing was the "wake-up" call that I had a potentially life-threatening medical condition that needed prompt treatment.

I consulted my primary care doctor who recommended a sleep study and possible use of a CPAP face mask breathing device. We discussed it further and agreed that I do have some form of sleep apnea, so a sleep study would not give us any more information except that a CPAP device would be needed. I did not want a CPAP; it certainly wasn't convenient, hygienic, comfortable and there was published data that patient compliance was extremely low when it came to wearing it. I mentioned to my doctor that I wear a splint and that perhaps it was causing the sleep apnea. He said it was possible and since I wasn't keen to a CPAP device, he suggested I consult my dentist for possible solutions.

I called Dr Bill Gerlach when I got home and explained the whole situation. Dr Bill told me about the TAP3 device. TAP stands for Thornton Adjustable Positioner. He told me about the device, its conveniences, its small in-the-mouth size, its ease of use and most notably, its high rate of compliance by patients for wearing it, something around 95%. Dr Bill also has sleep apnea and was using the TAP3 device for a couple of months when I called. He described how the TAP3 helped reduce his apneatic episodes dramatically. If it worked for Dr Bill, then what he says about the device is truly remarkable. Wow! When do we start?

I scheduled an appointment to pick up the sleep monitor device to wear overnight so we could get some baseline sleep data and determine the severity of my sleep apnea. It is a very small device (size of a deck of cards) worn around your chest with some simple wired connections on your abdomen and fingertip and a plastic breath tube that gently lies under your nostrils. It was easy to sleep with, comfortable and programmed by a member of Dr Bill's staff to come on at a preset time and turn off at a preset time. The next day I returned the unit to Dr Bill's office so he could download and print out the data for analysis.

From the data, I definitely had sleep apnea, moderate, but still apnea. The data showed definite snoring episodes, stoppage of breathing, low blood oxygenation levels and waking instances. No wonder I was always tired! I came back in for jaw measurements and impressions to be made for the TAP3. It took a couple of weeks and then my TAP3 device arrived!

Dr Bill made sure the TAP3 fit comfortably on my teeth, showed me how to do the simple ½ turn adjustment and how to use the "chew toys", two rubber pieces that you bite on in the morning after you remove the device to massage your jaw, which has been jutting out a bit during the night. The TAP3 works by moving your lower jaw ever so slightly forward, just millimeters, so that your airway is kept open. Each night, you ask your spouse if there was snoring, if they say yes, you simply turn the screw in the upper part of the device, ½ turn clockwise, which moves your jaw out ¼ of a millimeter. You try this setting for that night, and repeat ½ turns until your spouse says everything was quiet or almost quiet. You come back in two weeks to discuss your progress and check your fit with Dr Bill. One month later, you come back for the sleep monitor again and wear it for one night to gather secondary sleep data to compare to your baseline data.

Well, bottom-line: Good news!! The TAP3 device definitely has made a difference for me! I now wake up fresh every day, have energy to get up and exercise again, only get up during the night one time, no more snoring, no falling asleep during the day and most important of all – I do not stop breathing during the night! My wife can now get a good night's sleep and not have to worry about me not breathing for good during the night! It is comfortable to wear, easy to use and does not interfere with tongue movement or breathing. Wearing the device actually allows me to breathe through my nose easier now (I was a habitual mouth-breather!).

This is a dental solution to a medical problem and medical (not dental) insurance covered the entire cost of the TAP3 and 90% of the sleep studies. It is classified as a prosthetic device or appliance for insurance purposes. And it is much less expensive than a CPAP device.

What are YOU waiting for? If you snore at night, you probably have some level of sleep apnea which can progressively get more serious and life threatening as the years go on. Do yourself and your loved ones a huge favor – call Dr Bill today and schedule an appointment! Do it NOW before it is too late.

You saved my life, Dr Bill! And for that I am eternally thankful!

Richard Komar, Plano TX, Age 58