

## Article 1

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Ask the doctor

FEATURES - HEALTHY LIVING

**Device worn in mouth may curb sleep apnea**

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Dr. **David Lawler** is a dentist with Dental Sleep Medicine of Southern Indiana.

Question: If you have sleep problems, you don't necessarily think of seeing a dentist. How can a dentist help people with sleep apnea?

Answer: Sleep-related breathing disorders are characterized by different levels of airway collapse. Simple snoring is just vibration of tissue. Then there's upper airway resistance syndrome -- a loud, straining sound that someone is making when they're desperately trying to suck air through a narrow airway space.

The most severe form of upper airway collapse is when the airway totally closes off, with the tongue occluding the airway -- that's obstructive sleep apnea.

The first step of CPR is the jaw thrust maneuver, so the rescue breather can breathe for the victim. You pull the jaw forward, which moves the tongue out of the way.

We make these appliances that are like a retainer that people wear in their sleep. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine says that oral appliance therapy can be used for first-line therapy for both mild and moderate sleep apnea or for those severe sleep apnea patients who (can't tolerate) CPAP (a continuous positive airway pressure machine, the standard treatment for sleep apnea).

Q: Do most dentists make these oral appliances?

A: It doesn't take a whole lot to make these, but it takes an extreme amount of training to effectively manage somebody. The dentist has to have some way of knowing if what he's doing is effective.

Q: How do you do that?

A. We use home monitoring instruments. It's very possible that with these oral appliances, we can make the snoring noise go away without making the sleep disorder go away. So unless you've got some way of documenting the process, it can cause harm.

We use a watch pad, a very sophisticated instrument that fits on the patient's arm. One probe goes to one finger and checks oxygen levels and heartbeat. Another one on another finger picks up bouts of sleep suffocation. Then there's a snore sensor. So by looking at this study, we get a very in-depth knowledge of their sleep.

Q: Who pays for this?

A: We're able to get reimbursement insurance. It's not a dental procedure; it's a medical procedure.

Q: What advantage does this have over standard therapy?

A: Good compliance for a CPAP is using it four hours a night five days a week.

An oral appliance may not be able to manage somebody as well as a CPAP, but it manages them pretty well. The difference is that patients will wear the oral appliance. It's comfortable.

Have a topic for Ask the Doctor? Contact Star reporter Shari Rudavsky at (317) 444-6354 or via e-mail at shari.rudavsky@indystar.com.

Dr. **David Lawler** is a dentist with Dental Sleep Medicine of Southern Indiana.

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