

Elder Wisdom - Do You Snore? Part 2

by Rene Dominquez

In Part 1 of this article, I discussed my snoring habits and their impact on my life. At the end of the first article it was determined that I had severe sleep apnea. My journey continues as I proceed to address my sleep apnea and my introduction to and use of a CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) device.

This phase of my journey began with a one-on-one session with a technician at the sleep center where I was evaluated. I was given the opportunity to discuss my feelings (that's right my feelings – something, some men not associated with NMMW, know little about) regarding CPAP therapy. I was given the opportunity to try out different masks. Some masks covered my nose, others covered my nose and mouth, and there was one that fit into my nose called nasal pillows (really good if a mask stimulates claustrophobia). My choice was a nasal mask with a “gel pack” air seal. This choice was based on my personal comfort. That's right, MY PERSONAL COMFORT (something we men do not always prioritize is our personal comfort). In some cases, your choice may not be as open the choice I described. For example, if you breathe through you mouth you may have to choose a mask that covers both your nose and mouth. In this case, it is best to determine the one that provides the most comfort as this mask will become one of your personal “best friends” for a long time.

Step two was to make sure that the sleep center, writing the prescription for the CPAP device, and my insurance carrier were coordinated (a few calls from me determined that they were not very well coordinated). So I got involved and facilitated communication between them.

Next, I needed to schedule a class with the organization, selected by my insurance carrier, to receive a trial of a CPAP device. The class lasted a little over an hour and could have easily gone to two hours, if my fellow participants (all men) had been a bit more engaged. **ELDER WISDOM:** Follow the New Mexico Men's Wellness motto: **YOU HAVE TO DO IT YOURSELF, BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO IT ALONE.** Engage in this process, as your health is at stake. Learn what you can about this therapy, ask questions, and engage your classmates. They often have some of the same concerns that you do (but are not as assertive as they should be ... but you knew that – right). At that class I received my CPAP machine and selected the mask that I felt would work best for me. Then I went home and tried my first night with my new ‘best friend’!

My first night went well. I was able to get the machine set up and followed the other instructions from class to make sure I got the mask on, and that the mask made a good seal, so it functioned as it did in class. Getting to sleep and keeping the mask on all night were different matters. I found that I was concerned about the mask and my comfort. I made several adjustments to make sure the mask fit correctly and, at the same time, was comfortable. This preoccupation about the mask, along with checking to see if the mask was recording properly, kept me awake for over an hour. Then I fell asleep, but not for long. I tolerated this therapy for a total of four hours (four hours seems to be a magic number that is recorded and used by some insurance carriers for your suitability for CPAP therapy).

(Note: All activities I did with the CPAP device, and how the device reacted were recorded on a memory card. I found out that periodically I would get a new card and would have to return the old one so that the data could be reviewed by the provider of the trial machine and the results sent to my insurance carrier). You can review some of those statistics recorded by your machine by following the user manual or as discussed in your class. That first week, was not what I would call “record setting” in terms of the hours on the machine but met my expectations of using the machine for more than 4 hours per night.

Each successive night got better. I was fiddling less with the mask’s adjustments and sleeping more with the CPAP machine. Today, over 30 days later my statistics showed that I averaged 6 hours of therapy per night. I had 22 sessions that exceeded 4 hours. I logged 149 hours of therapy in those 22 sessions. This performance, I felt was a good start.

Some food for thought, if you decide to address your snoring issue and it is diagnosed as being caused by sleep apnea, try CPAP therapy but remember to:

- Set your expectations at an achievable level
- Be persistent in using the CPAP device
- Review your progress periodically
- Use all resources available to you to address concerns or issues promptly
- Follow the advice provided
- Remember change is good, although not always easy

A few other tips are worth considering, if you try CPAP:

- Use humidity to regulate dryness. It had just been suggested that I add more humidity to keep my breathing balanced and allowed me to have more continuous sleep
- Have some distilled water on hand and keep it replenished, when you start using your CPAP machine, as this is needed to produce the humidity
- Purchase some non-alcohol-based wipes for cleaning your mask
- Place your CPAP machine lower than your sleep level, especially if you use humidity, as this allows any excess water vapor to return to the machine
- Don’t make your mask too tight as it causes red marks on your face that aren’t very attractive and will probably hurt
- Keep with your normal sleep routine if it works for you

If you have sleep apnea, research it on the internet and talk to others. You will be amazed at what you find out. For instance, I have found that there are therapies to address sleep apnea, other than CPAP. These therapies include self help, dental appliances (TAP 3), surgery, etc. (check them out http://www.helpguide.org/life/sleep_apnea.htm).

Some methods, such as sterile paper tape over one’s mouth, definitely have an effect on snoring; provide a reason why you have nothing to say to your partner (because you can’t). Its value in addressing sleep apnea is unknown. I have also heard that some prescriptive drugs address snoring and sleep apnea but I have not determined their overall long term effectiveness.

Therapies like self help, addresses one's sleep habits that are not conducive to good sleep. These habits include reading in bed, eating in bed, and others; make logical sense to me. I believe that an appropriate sleep pattern is also beneficial. For instance, going to bed at 7PM and getting up at 2 AM is not a healthy pattern, nor is going to bed at 1 AM and getting up at 5 AM. Remember that whatever it takes to address getting effective sleep (REM sleep) is vital the healthy functioning of our physical body and may address several health issues in addition to the apnea.

Research and information from other CPAP users revealed some interesting facts about CPAP therapy. Not only does it control and stop snoring, but it stabilizes fluctuating blood sugars and decreases blood pressure. Sleep apnea has been linked with congestive heart failure, depression, insomnia, cardiac arrhythmia, etc. Lots of things get fixed when you use this therapy. It is good to remember that CPAP is a lifelong device that helps maintain your overall health.

An interesting piece of information is found in an article from ABC News entitled:

Millions of Diabetics May Have Undiagnosed Sleep Apnea

Condition Poses Health Threat; Testing, Treatments Are Simple

This article can be read at: <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/DiabetesNews/story?id=7873837&page=1>

Since I have started using the CPAP machine, my spouse has had fewer night time sleep interruptions and has increased the amount of sleep she gets as do I.

Traveling with a CPAP machine is not an issue, provide you take some actions. Those actions include making a sign to paste on your machine stating "This is a CPAP machine prescribed by my physician to address my sleep apnea diagnosis. Additionally, if you have a humidification system, remove the water reservoir and place the reservoir in a sealed plastic bag away from the machine. Water tends not to mix well with an electric motor and may prevent the machine from functioning (I found this out first hand).

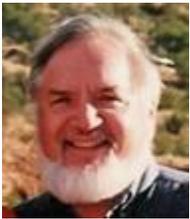
This therapy for sleep apnea works for me. I definitely have more energy, am less tired, don't go to bed early (at 8 PM), and think more clearly. It may be a viable alternative for you. Regardless, you owe it to yourself and your loved ones to have chronic snoring issues addressed. It just may save your life and/or increase your productivity and zest for life.

SPECIAL NOTE: I have been advised to return to one of the issues I raised in part one of this article about a predominately male phenomenon namely "farting". Well, I have not found any shareable wisdom to date, nor have I prioritized this issue for my life. However, I strongly encourage other men of wisdom to share their experiences of "what works" for them with the NMMW community through Man Alive!

My wisdom tidbit to the Men's Wellness Community is that if your loved ones complain about your snoring, take them seriously; consciously discuss that issue with your doctor. Who knows, maybe you have sleep apnea. Finding out and treating it could save your life and definitely your relationships. Or, to put it another way follow Nike's motto and:



NOTE: "JUST DO IT" and the swish are Registered Trademarks of Nike, Inc.



René Dominguez is a Business and Technology consultant living in Vancouver, Washington. He was very active in New Mexico Men's Wellness's, publication of MAN ALIVE!, the Highway Men, and has co-lead sessions at several Conferences. He continues with one of his passions by being active in Men's Groups and Programs. René can be reached at renedom@aol.com. Questions? I will be at the 2009 Fall Conference and would be happy to discuss this article with you, just stop me and ask.