



DOWN SYNDROME GUILD
OF DALLAS

Sleep Apnea in People with Down Syndrome

Sleep apnea is a serious health problem that is common in people with Down syndrome of all ages. If not treated it can lead to heart and lung damage and can also contribute to behavioral and psychological problems. Sleep apnea is defined as a complete cessation of breathing from any cause during sleep, resulting in decreased oxygen in the blood or increased carbon dioxide (greater increase than what would be seen in normal sleep). For people with Down syndrome, it is commonly caused by obstruction of the airway.

Inadequate sleep, particularly if it is a chronic problem, has a huge effect on a person's ability to function in her daily activities. It can lead to irritation, problems controlling emotions, loss of concentration, attention problems, and apparent loss of cognitive skills. There has even been evidence that psychotic behavior has improved with the treatment of sleep apnea. In adults with Down syndrome, symptoms such as these may lead to misdiagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer's disease, or the assumption that the person is simply regressing in their skills.

Due to the high incidence of sleep apnea in people with Down syndrome, symptoms such as a long history of snoring combined with restless sleep, excessive daytime sleepiness, and early morning headaches, a physical exam should always include questions designed to determine if sleep apnea may be present.

Reprinted from Mental Wellness in Adults with Down Syndrome by Dennis McGuire, Ph.D. & Brian Chicoine, M.D.

Local Resource:

The Sleep and Breathing Disorders Center at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center offers a comprehensive team of experts in pulmonary medicine, neurology, psychiatry, pediatrics, otolaryngology, surgery and rehabilitation medicine to manage all sleep problems and breathing difficulties including sleep apnea. To schedule an appointment for an evaluation contact:

Sleep and Breathing Disorders Center
5939 Harry Hines Blvd
2nd Floor, Suite 110
Dallas, Tx 75390
214-645-5337