**Do You Have Sleep Apnea?**

Sleep apnea is a disorder wherein you stop breathing during the night - one medical expert claimed to have seen patients who stopped breathing 100 times every hour! Most of the time, sleep apnea is of the obstructive variety, which means the throat muscles relax to the point that not enough oxygen is taken into the lungs. The sufferer then awakens to open his or her airways.

Another type of sleep apnea, called central sleep apnea, results when the brain fails to send the proper signals to the muscles of the airways. Sometimes, sleep apnea is the result of a combination of these. Obstructive sleep apnea is the most common type. In a sleep lab, professionals can diagnose the disorder and work toward appropriate treatment.

**Signs and Symptoms of Sleep Apnea**

If you are concerned that you may have sleep apnea, evaluate this list to see if you may be suffering from it. If you think you are, see a medical professional as soon as you can - sleep apnea is considered a serious condition.

\* **Snoring** - Does your partner or spouse complain about your snoring? Snoring, particularly loud snoring, is one of the primary symptoms of sleep apnea. Snoring is said to result from the vibration of the relaxed airways, particularly the soft palate.

\* **Daytime sleepiness** - For many people, feeling sleepy in the middle of the afternoon is considered normal and nothing to worry about - and for the most part, it is. But if daytime sleepiness affects your normal functioning - if you can't drive for half an hour or so without getting sleepy, for example, or if you have trouble focusing on tasks during the day - then sleep apnea may be the problem.

\* **Irritability** - Even though you may not know you have sleep apnea, and you may not even feel sleepy, your pattern of interrupted sleep may result in irritability that does not seem to have any cause.

Common Treatment Options

What treatment is available for those with sleep apnea? Medically, one of the most common treatments is Continuous Positive Airflow Pressure, or CPAP. This device is a small box to which is attached a tube and a mask. You wear the mask at night, and it delivers a continuous flow of oxygen into your throat and airways, keeping them open and providing you with much-needed air.

There are also some factors associated with sleep apnea that you can eliminate from your lifestyle. Smoking, obesity, and drinking too much alcohol are all associated with sleep apnea.