

Insomnia Caused by Sleep Apnea

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A 56-year-old gentleman came to my clinic with chief complaint of refractory insomnia. For more than ten years he has had difficulty falling into sleep but had more problems staying asleep. He frequently woke up during sleep with choking-like feeling and shortness of breath. His wife noted that he snored very loudly and occasionally stopped breathing during sleep. He feels very tired almost every morning especially last year. He took nap in the daytime on the weekend and was found asleep whenever he was sitting in the couch during the day. He has gained significant weight during the last ten years. He tried everything but was not able to lose any weight.

He was prescribed several sleeping pills and yet was not able to get resting sleep. He had to lie down on the living room couch for sleep last year because he was very shortness of breath if he lay down in his bed. He asked me if I could help him sleep so that he could function well. He was about to quit his job as security guard.

I carefully reviewed his prior medical records and examined him. He apparently had hypertension, hyperlipidemia, morbid obesity, possible early liver cirrhosis due to fatty liver, GERD and possible ischemic heart disease. He has all features of obstructive sleep apnea. I told him that he had a very severe obstructive sleep apnea which was the reason why he was not able to have resting sleep and lose any weight. I will not prescribe him any sedatives to help him sleep. Most sleeping pills might potentially suppress the breathing center in his brain, which can lead to death during sleep.

My clinic arranged him for sleep study which confirmed my diagnosis. He was treated with CPAP. He came back for follow-up visit one month later. He said he could finally have a very sound resting sleep that he had not had for the last ten years. He started to lose some weight and do more exercises. He will keep his job. He asked me to help him lose the extra weight he gained during the last ten years. I helped him with the combination diet/medication/exercise program. He was able to lose 100 pounds over a 10-month period.

Sleep apnea has become a very common problem due to the rapidly growing obese population. Refractory insomnia is one of the prominent symptoms. Sedative sleeping medications potentially could lead to death during sleep if obstructive sleep apnea is not properly treated. Weight loss is almost impossible for untreated patients with sleep apnea. If you have concerns about insomnia, weight gain or snoring, please contact Dr. Jeff Ye, North Atlanta Medical & Digestive Care at 770-346-0900. We can help!