

Let's Talk About...

Obstructive sleep apnea in children

What is obstructive sleep apnea?

Obstructive sleep apnea is a condition that causes short, temporary, and repeated breathing pauses while your child sleeps. When your child has sleep apnea, they may wake up frequently while sleeping because of the obstruction (airflow blockage) in their lungs.



What causes obstructive sleep apnea?

Children with the following risk factors are more likely to have obstructive sleep apnea:

- Large tonsils or adenoids
- Obesity
- Down syndrome
- Family history of sleep apnea
- Narrow facial bones
- Frequent sinus infections
- Allergies
- Asthma
- Acid reflux
- Muscular dystrophy or cerebral palsy
- Cleft palate or history of cleft palate
- Small chin or throat

What are the signs of obstructive sleep apnea?

Your child may show the following signs of sleep apnea:

- Snoring
- Problems breathing through their nose day and night
- Breathing pauses while sleeping
- Gasping, snorting, or choking sounds while sleeping
- Waking up often from sleep
- Bedwetting (usually if your child did not wet the bed before)
- Restlessness while sleeping
- Night sweating
- Moodiness or irritability during the day
- Nasal voice
- Attention problems
- Headaches
- Sleepiness
- Difficulty waking up

How is obstructive sleep apnea diagnosed?

Your child's healthcare provider will ask about your child's health history and look for signs of obstructive sleep apnea.

Your child may also need an overnight sleep study called a polysomnography (polly-som-NOG-gruh-fee), or PSG. During a PSG, healthcare providers will watch your child's breathing, heart rate, oxygen level, brain activity, and movement while sleeping.

