

Obstructive sleep apnoea in children

What is it?

Obstructive sleep apnoea is when something partly or completely blocks the throat during sleep. This causes breathing to reduce or stop for a short time before starting again. This often happens with a gasp, snort or a jerk of the body. Children with obstructive sleep apnoea often snore.

Poor quality sleep can affect a child's behaviour and concentration. Obstructive sleep apnoea in children is usually caused by enlarged tonsils and adenoids. Occasionally, obstructive sleep apnoea may be caused by being overweight or obese, hay fever or allergies.

What will my GP do now?

If your child's tonsils and adenoids are enlarged, your GP will refer them directly to an ear, nose and throat surgeon. In some cases, a sleep study may be necessary. Your GP may recommend:

- **Overnight oxygen monitoring (oximetry)** – where a small device on your child's finger measures their blood oxygen level overnight
- **Inpatient sleep study** – referral to a paediatric sleep physician (a doctor that specialises in children's sleep problems)

Your GP will discuss a treatment plan with you if they suspect the sleep apnoea is due to weight or allergies.

What questions could I ask my doctor?

- Does my child need surgery?
- Is my child at risk of any health issues?
- Does my child need medications?



What will my GP do in the future?

Your GP may see your child again to check if the treatment is helping. If your child's symptoms are not improving, your GP may recommend a specialist.

A specialist may give your child a CPAP (continuous positive airways pressure) machine to help keep their airway open at night while they sleep.

What can I do?

Continue observing your child's sleep patterns. Follow any advice given to you by your GP and tell them if your child continues to snore or has irregular breathing noises. Help your child to be active and eat well. Check your child's energy level and concentration during the day.

What supports are available?

South Western Sydney Local Health District has sleep medicine clinics in Liverpool and Camden. Both offer a range of sleep medicine services.

You can also speak to your GP about a referral to a private specialist or sleep clinic.

Where can I learn more?

- **raisingchildren.net.au** – obstructive sleep apnoea: raisingchildren.net.au
- **The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne** – childhood obstructive sleep apnoea: rch.org.au