

## Is That Sleepiness During Pregnancy Normal or a Sign of Sleep Apnea?

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DENVER — Most pregnant women complain of being tired. Some of them however, could be suffering more than normal fatigue associated with their pregnancy; they may have developed obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), a periodic cessation of breathing during sleep. If left untreated, OSA poses a variety of health risks to these women, from diabetes to high blood pressure and stroke. Recent studies have also indicated that pregnant women with OSA are at risk for delivering low birthweight or preterm infants.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) occurs when a person's airway collapses repeatedly during sleep. This repeated stoppage of airflow causes low blood-oxygen levels and strain on the heart. The person also experiences a brief interruption of sleep when the brain wakes up to start breathing again.

Untreated, OSA causes high blood pressure, heart disease, heart attacks, strokes, irregular heart rhythms, diabetes and mental decline. People with untreated sleep apnea are also at higher risk of having a motor vehicle or workplace accident caused from sleep deprivation.

“Unfortunately, many pregnant women don't get tested for sleep apnea because the associated symptoms, like snoring and sleepiness, are also common in a normal pregnancy,” said Ann Cartwright, MPAS, PS-C, sleep specialist at National Jewish Health. “Pregnant women who were overweight before their pregnancy or who have developed high blood pressure or diabetes during their pregnancy should consider getting evaluated for sleep apnea.”

If you are pregnant and have any of the following symptoms, talk to your doctor about getting tested for sleep apnea:

- Snoring
- Unrefreshing sleep
- Daytime sleepiness
- Morning headaches
- Nighttime heartburn
- Difficulty focusing/concentrating
- Insomnia
- Poor memory
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) is a safe and effective treatment for sleep apnea during pregnancy. In most cases woman who did not suffer from sleep apnea prior to pregnancy will return to normal sleep after giving birth.

“After being diagnosed with sleep apnea and using CPAP nightly I have noticed a considerable difference in my energy level during the day,” said Kelly Goelz. “I just wish I would have known about pregnant sleep apnea before my second pregnancy.”

**National Jewish Health** is the leading respiratory hospital in the nation. Founded 124 years ago as a nonprofit hospital, National Jewish Health today is the only facility in the world dedicated exclusively to groundbreaking medical research and treatment of patients with respiratory, cardiac, immune and related disorders. Patients and families come to National Jewish Health from around the world to receive cutting-edge, comprehensive, coordinated care. To learn more, visit the [media resources page](#).

## Media Contacts

Our team is available to arrange interviews, discuss events and story ideas.

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