

Sleep apnea myths

Because sleep apnea screening and testing is on the rise, it has become important for commercial drivers to be aware of the differences between sleep apnea myths and facts. The FMCSA has had sleep guidelines in place for more than 23 years, and there are more than 30 million Americans with undiagnosed sleep problems, so it's not a new problem. However, the issue is getting more attention recently because dozens of clinical studies clearly show people with untreated sleep apnea have a seven-fold risk for accidents and significantly more health risks.

Myth: I can tell when I am sleepy and control it, so I don't have sleep apnea.

Sleep is not voluntary, especially with sleep apnea. If you're drowsy, you can fall asleep and never even know it. When you're driving, being asleep for even a few seconds can kill you or someone else.

Myth: I get plenty of sleep, so I do not have sleep apnea.

The average person needs seven or eight hours of sleep a night. If you go to bed late and wake up early to an alarm clock you probably are building up a sleep debt. If you spend eight hours in bed but still feel tired, you may have a disorder like sleep apnea, preventing you from getting enough quality sleep.

Myth: I must be obese to have sleep apnea.

Several common screening factors are predictive of sleep apnea, and obesity is No. 1 on the list. Do you snore, gasp or make choking sounds during sleep? Body mass index 30 or higher? Neck size 17 inches or more (15.5 for women)? High blood pressure, type 2 diabetes or heart



disease? Any two suggest a high likelihood of sleep apnea.

Myth: Even if wear CPAP, I won't feel any different. Drivers who have successfully treated their sleep apnea with CPAP typically say that they feel years younger, are finally able to lose weight and have increased energy and stamina.

Myth: If I test positive for sleep apnea, my employer will use it against me.

When a driver tests positive for sleep apnea, he/she only needs to show that they are being treated with CPAP and are wearing the device for four hours, five days per week. Your CPAP will track the usage hours that occur, and no other information is looked at by your DOT examiner or employer. Your health information always belongs to you.

If you answered "yes" to the questions listed above, you may have obstructive sleep apnea, but you are not alone. Sleep apnea affects more than 18 million American adults and about 28 percent of commercial truckers. Consider discussing this issue with your physician or DOT examiner. It's time to be driving toward sleep wellness.

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