

CAN'T *sleep* A WINK?

DON'T LET SLEEP PROBLEMS KEEP YOU OFF THE ROAD

While the daytime sleepiness that is a symptom of undiagnosed sleep apnea is an inconvenience that interferes with normal daily activities for many people, it is a dangerous situation for those who drive for a living. In fact, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) says that as many 28 percent of commercial driver's license holders have sleep apnea.¹

Irvin Belton is one of those drivers. A 2002 surgical procedure did not alleviate his snoring, so when he began driving commercially in 2004, he was still snoring, not sleeping well during the night and waking up tired. "I had headaches all of the time and was tired throughout the day," he adds. "I had to pull over during the day to rest many more times than required by regulations."

A sleep study conducted at the DeKalb Medical Sleep Disorders Center showed that Belton does have sleep apnea. The breathing-related sleep disorder causes brief interruptions of breathing during sleep and is not only dangerous for drivers who can fall asleep at the wheel, but it can lead to other health problems, including high blood pressure, memory problems, stroke and weight gain.

The good news is that sleep apnea is treatable with the use of continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP). The idea of wearing a mask attached to a machine while sleeping may seem cumbersome, but new mask designs that are made especially for women or cover nostrils only, are more comfortable and easier to use, says T. Massey Arrington, RPSGT, MBA, manager of the Sleep Disorders Center.

Increased awareness of the potential danger of untreated sleep disorders has generated a growth in the number of "do it yourself" tests, but Arrington warns that home tests are not appropriate for everyone. "Home tests are less accurate than a sleep center study, so anyone who has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, lung disease or is obese should have the test conducted in a center where they are safely monitored with equipment that picks up on small anomalies in breathing that might be missed on home tests," he explains. Although the Sleep Disorders Center offers home testing, Arrington suggests talking with staff members before choosing a home test over a sleep study in the center. "The home test measures whether or not you snore and identifies the potential for moderate to severe apnea. An accurate diagnosis that leads to the proper treatment is only possible with a full study in a center."

Belton doesn't regret taking the time to undergo his sleep study. Not only did he learn how to treat his sleep apnea, he also learned how to manage his sleep routine even though he drives at night. "In order to maintain my certification to drive, I have to document use of my CPAP and show that I am sleeping well," he says. "I've made a lot of changes to improve my sleep by using the CPAP, sleeping at the same time each day and making sure I eat healthy while on the road."



NEED SOME ZZZS? For more information about the DeKalb Medical Sleep Disorders Center, call **404.596.4796**. You can also learn more about treatments for sleep problems at a free May 20 seminar. See page 13 for information.

1. Pack AI, Dinges DF, & Maislin G. (2002) A Study of Prevalence of Sleep Apnea among Commercial Truck Drivers (Report No. DOT-RT-02-030). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, FMCSA.