



The Children's Doctor

All you need to know about... Obstructive Sleep Apnoea



What is obstructive sleep apnoea?

Obstructive sleep apnoea is a blockage of the upper airways which occurs during sleep. In childhood, it is usually caused by enlarged adenoids or tonsils which obstruct the airway during sleep. Other causes include hayfever and obesity.

What are the symptoms of obstructive sleep apnoea?

Most parents will notice loud snoring in the affected child. They may also notice that the child has pauses in their breathing pattern or difficulty breathing whilst asleep. Children may be restless during sleep. Children with obstructive sleep apnoea may breathe through their mouth during sleep rather than their nose. Sometimes, the only symptoms of obstructive sleep apnoea may be daytime sleepiness, poor attention, behaviour problems or learning difficulties.

How do I know if my child has obstructive sleep apnoea?

If you are concerned that your child might have obstructive sleep apnoea, you should see your GP. You can discuss your concerns and the symptoms of the child. Your GP will recommend a "sleep study" which monitors breathing, heart rate, oxygen levels and brain activity during sleep. No pain or needles are involved, wires are simply stuck to the skin. A sleep study does involve an overnight stay in hospital but it is recommended that a parent stay with the child during admission.

Is there any cure for obstructive sleep apnoea?

The cure will depend on the underlying cause of obstructive sleep apnoea. The most common cause is enlargement of the tonsils and adenoids. In this case, most children will be completely cured by surgical removal of the tonsils and adenoids.

If you are concerned about your child, you should see your GP.