Recovery after Stroke: Diagnosis and Treatment of Sleep Disorders

Diagnosing Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA)

Although you may experience the symptoms that suggest OSA, often times, it is your bed partner or family member who notices your sleep problem. You should talk to your doctor if you think you may be experiencing symptoms of OSA. To officially diagnose the problem, your doctor may arrange a sleep test called a polysomnogram (PSG). This painless, all-night test will study your sleep patterns. It is typically done in a special sleep center.

Treating Obstructive Sleep Apnea

Treatment options can vary, but include:

- **Good sleep hygiene practices**, losing weight, avoiding alcohol and unnecessary medicines.
- **Changing your sleeping position** to avoid sleeping on your back. This can be done by sewing an object such as a tennis ball to the back of your pajama top (between your shoulder blades--making it uncomfortable for you to lie flat on your back), or by purchasing a positional therapy device.
- Your doctor may prescribe a special **dental appliance**. This device is worn at night while you sleep and can open up your airways and improve your breathing.
- **Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP)** therapy is a form of breathing assistance during sleep. This machine uses air pressure to open up your airways. The CPAP machine blows air through a tube to a mask that you wear while you sleep. People using CPAP report having higher energy levels, better thinking abilities and improved well-being during the day. They also say they are less sleepy.
- In severe cases of OSA surgery may be necessary.
Professionals Can Help

Healthcare professionals can determine whether a referral to a specialist is needed. A certified sleep center, with access to a health psychologist, a behavioral sleep medicine specialist, and a sleep laboratory for sleep studies could also be helpful.

Rehabilitation is a lifelong commitment and an important part of recovering from a stroke. The above considerations related to sleep problems may complement other elements of a comprehensive rehabilitation program after stroke.

Remember to work closely with your healthcare provider and ask, “Where am I on my stroke recovery journey?”

Note: This fact sheet is compiled from general, publicly available information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. Stroke survivors should consult their doctors about any personal medical concerns.

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