

## **Elder Wisdom - Do You Snore?**

New Mexico Men's Wellness has provided me the opportunity to be on the receiving end of much wisdom over the years. Now I hope to return some of that wisdom to others.

My story starts years ago, when I was a young man. My wife would often comment about the amount of noise I made while sleeping. Being a typical male, I determined that perhaps it wasn't as bad as it was being portrayed -- mainly because I had heard nothing and slept as soundly as always. So, in typical male fashion I unconsciously put those comments in my memory bank for posterity.

On occasion our family vacationed in Chautauqua, New York, a beautiful Victorian community in western New York State. On these vacations we would often rent a room or house with another family. Sometimes we would share a very large room with the other members of our family. My children would comment on the loud noise that would emanate from the area where I slept, along with an unusual odor. Well, more relevant comments that I, unconsciously, stashed in my memory bank.

In later years, on another vacation, my family and I again shared a large bedroom. This time, not only were there comments about my sleeping habits, but the language used became more specific -- and the comments were accompanied by actions. I would be bombarded with pillows and told that my snoring was loud, sometimes as loud as a train, and that I had an issue with flatulence caused by farting (another involuntary act, I have learned, is typically male phenomenon), that, in addition to being noisy also produced an odor. Once again, I had heard nothing and smelled nothing and unconsciously placed that information into my memory repository.

You know, this unconscious behavior is beginning to have a pattern that I have found out is a typical behavior in some men often referred to as "doing not thinking". Just ask your spouse.

As time passed, I had the opportunity to participate at some Men's Wellness sleepovers (a.k.a., "Conferences"). The orientation package mentioned something about bringing earplugs if other men snoring in the same room where you were sleeping would disturb you. AHA! Perhaps this snoring stuff is simply a male phenomenon, a phenomenon that bonds males together. Then during the night, I was politely nudged and asked to roll over on my side, not once but several times. Well, perhaps I do have a problem with snoring, but then, maybe it was just the situation and possibly some men are just very light sleepers. Once again, unconsciously I stashed the episode in my memory.

Later, I invited an associate, who happened to be part of the New Mexico Men's Wellness community, to join me on a trip to drum up some business. So off we went, flying from Albuquerque to Chicago. I suggested that we save some expenses by rooming together at a hotel close to the airport, and so we did. Retiring, I said good night to my colleague and fell asleep quickly. I had a very good night's sleep. Rising early, I noticed that my colleague was gone. The condition of his bed made me think he was just up before me, and I thought no more of it. Later, my colleague returned, still in his sleeping clothes, and I asked if everything was all right? He responded that he had had to get another room to sleep in, as my snoring was so disruptive. WOW! (conscious awareness finally) I guess I really do have a serious snoring problem.

Clearly, I must make a lot of noise at night. I began feeling bad about subjecting my wife and family to this obnoxious, unconscious affliction. So as a result, and to provide my wife with a better night's sleep, I decided to sleep in another room and later on purchased some "Breathe Right" strips for when we had to share a room. This seemed to work fairly well. The strips worked OK, but they were a pain to put on. Pain caused by my oily skin that needed to be cleansed before applying the strips so they would stick. As a result, I used the strips sparingly and only when absolutely needed.

Time passed and one night when our two granddaughters spent the night with us (a granddaughter sleep over). The following morning was somewhat revealing about the previous night. They both started teasing me about my snoring and "tooting". "Out of the mouths of babes comes the truth". Although we didn't share a room, my sleep habits were once again causing problems for me. After storing that additional information unconsciously in my proverbial memory, I decided that if I wanted to enjoy our granddaughters sleep overs, it was back to the "breathe Right" strips.

More years passed, and I was diagnosed with having Type II diabetes. I already had high blood pressure under treatment and now had to cope with diabetes. So, as a result of this additional health situation, and at my doctor's recommendation, I started to lose weight. I had tried losing weight before but could never keep it off, and I had quite a bit I could shed. Well shed I did, nicely and gradually. My blood pressure dropped and required less medication, and my blood sugar was also coming down. AH, success at last. Then, my weight loss stopped. Not only was I not losing the weight I wanted, but I was gaining back some of the weight I lost. My doctor recommended that I get checked to see if I was getting enough of the right kind of sleep and he referred me to their sleep clinic.

At the sleep clinic, I had a consultation that brought back some of those unconsciously stored snoring memories into consciousness. I also remembered that members of my family had snoring issues. The doctor suggested that be tested for sleep apnea. Sleep apnea? What's the \*#?&! is that? Well, in addition to not getting the right amount and kind of sleep, it turns out that curing sleep apnea may assist in losing weight. The weight I lost helped me with my blood sugar levels and my hypertension. As a result, I took the opportunity to spend a night at the sleep clinic to be tested for apnea. When I arrived, I was hooked up to a bunch of devices with a corresponding bundle of wires for tracking my sleep. In addition, I was monitored all night by a camera. Believe me; it wasn't nearly as bad as it sounds. The bundles of wires were connected to sensors on my head, chest, legs, and to a device that measured my breathing through my nose. The camera was very small and mounted in the ceiling, not obvious at all. The night was similar to spending the night in a hotel room (even though one of those memorable nights was not a good one, but this time I would be alone). Oh by the way, I still haven't found the cure for "tooting" but based on discussions with other men, it seems to be a function of maleness and most likely what I eat.

After spending the night at the sleep center and devouring one of their great breakfasts, I waited a few days so they could compile the results. The mound of data they had captured was summarized into one graph (very easy to read) and a series of summarized observations. Then one of the sleep clinic's doctors reviewed the results with me. The outcome wasn't pretty. I did snore (surprise, surprise), and worse than that, I was not getting enough Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep and not getting the amount of oxygen my body needed. I was diagnosed with severe sleep apnea. Severe

sleep apnea is a term used to characterize when one's airway is obstructed over 30 times an hour. This obstruction caused a drop in the oxygen level in my blood stream to 70% (normal is above 90%) and was causing a lack of REM sleep. Additionally, my brain would take me out of a sound sleep (deeper than REM sleep) and cause my body to awaken. The awakening occurred so that the muscles that controlled my wind passage would gain tone (the deep sleep I fell into, while relaxing to me caused my body to lose muscle tone) so that I could breathe. I was completely unaware of this awakening, but the graph was more telling. The doctor recommended some alternatives: a CPAP (Continuous Positive Air Pressure) machine to assist in my breathing, a mouth device that would keep my jaw from dropping when I went into a deep sleep thereby keeping my air passage open, and surgery to fix the air passage issue.

For more information about sleep apnea check out:

[http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/SleepApnea/SleepApnea\\_WhatIs.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/SleepApnea/SleepApnea_WhatIs.html) Or <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/sleep-apnea/DS00148>

Now, I am proceeding to the next step after determining that surgery and the mouth apparatus were not for me. Surgery was out because of the risks and the mouth apparatus because; I don't like sleeping with something in my mouth. That left me with the other alternative that involved getting fitted for an breathing appliance (CPAP machine with mask of my choosing) to assist me to breathe better each night. For how that turns out, stay tuned!

**My wisdom tidbit to the Men's Wellness Community is that if your loved ones complain about your snoring, take them seriously and consciously discuss that issue with you doctor, who knows maybe you have sleep apnea, finding out and treating it could save your life and definitely your relationships.**



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