

Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is a major concern, and the more we learn about it the more we learn it needs to be dealt with. Apnea is simply holding ones breath, so sleep apnea is breath holding during sleep. This is most commonly due to blockages which do not allow your body to get all the air it needs. The long term ramification of this decreased oxygen goes from as mild as being tired during the day, to early stroke, heart attack and death. It is not something to mess around with.

The best way to treat sleep apnea is with a CPAP, a machine which uses increased- pressure to hold open the airway while you sleep. Many people cannot tolerate the mask or the increased pressure it produces. When this happens there are surgical options that can be done. The most common procedure for sleep apnea is Uvulopalatopharyngoplasty (UPPP). The UPPP is like an extended tonsillectomy. It takes away most of the extra tissue that is responsible for the obstruction in your airway. It is easy to spot someone who has had a UPPP because they no longer have a uvula (the thing that hangs down in the back of your throat).

The second surgery which can be done is the AIRvance Hyoid and Tongue Suspension. These two surgeries use a screw into the jaw to suspend and tighten the airway. They are a great way to open up an airway and make more room for air to pass.

Other procedures such as septoplasty and turbinate reduction can also be done to help open the airway further, but only under rare circumstances would I ever do both surgery in the mouth and surgery in the nose.

Why do you remove tissue in a UPPP: The redundant tissue in the pharynx is collapsing and blocking the airway. Removal of the extra tissue will help breathing.

How do you do a UPPP: It is all done through the mouth. The mouth is held open during the entire procedure, and sometimes the pressure on the tongue can cause some tongue discomfort. A Bovie with monopolar electrical cautery is usually used to remove the extra tissue and uvula (the thing that hangs down in the back of your throat).

Important post-op instructions: Drinking plenty of water is far and away the most important thing. Also, you should eat nothing crunchy for 2 full weeks after surgery.

Unlike most surgeries a UPPP bleeding can happen a week after surgery, infact it is more likely a week later than a day later. This is because the scab is getting soft in preparation to fall off. If it falls off early it will bleed. This is why crunchy foods are avoided; they can scrape off the scab early. Most people will spend one night in the hospital. This is because in very rare events the increased amount of air after the extra tissue has been removed can cause problems in the lungs.

Long term ramifications: UPPP does not cure sleep apnea, it only helps. Weight loss and CPAP use are what are needed to eliminate it. It can make a lasting improvement, but it can get worse as the years go by.

How long does surgery last: the surgery itself only takes 15-20 minutes, maybe longer with a difficult airway or someone who can't open their mouth very wide.

