

Weight loss effective in overcoming sleep apnoea

Dramatic weight loss can reverse the effects of severe sleep apnoea, says a new study.

'Our findings suggest that weight loss may be an effective treatment strategy for sleep apnoea in obese men,' says study co-author Kari Johansson of the Karolinska Institute in Sweden.

Obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) is a common but under-diagnosed disorder, characterised by 10 second pauses in breathing during sleep, caused by the collapse of the upper airways during sleep.

Moderate and severe OSA (defined as 15 or more pauses per hour) carries an excess risk of vehicular crashes, heart disease and death.

Untreated, it is linked with increased risk of traffic accidents, as well as stroke and heart disease. Moderate and severe sleep apnoea also increases the risk of premature death.

People with overweight or obesity are more likely to develop the disease, and men are more affected than women.

The Karolinska study included 63 obese men, aged between 30 and 65 years, with moderate to severe OSA. They had undergone continuous positive airway pressure or CPAP, which produces more normal breathing patterns during sleep.

They were randomly assigned to two groups, one of which underwent an intense weight-loss programme, while the other served as a control group, for a period of nine weeks.

The results show that the weight loss group lost 19 kilos on average after nine weeks and more than halved the number of apnoea events.

None of the treated patients had severe sleep apnoea, half had only mild sleep apnoea and one in six could be declared healthy, says a Karolinska Institute release.

Researchers also noted that the effect of the weight loss programme was greatest in patients with severe sleep apnoea.

These findings were published in the British Medical Journal.

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