

# Feeling Like a Leaf in Autumn?

*Solutions from the Michigan Head & Neck Institute*

“Did you get a good night’s sleep?” Dr. Klein asks, intuitively knowing that many people did not. It’s an important question, especially one that men want to be honest in answering. Eighty percent of the people worldwide who are affected by a sleep disorder which upsets their breathing are men. The disorder, sleep apnea, has far-reaching consequences that range from diabetes to death.

“Every cell in your body temporarily suffocates when you’re not breathing correctly,” explains Dr. Klein, director of the Michigan Head & Neck Institute. “When cells don’t get enough oxygen they shrivel like a leaf in autumn, metaphorically speaking.” Unhealthy cells make one susceptible to cancer, heart disease, depression, headaches, weight gain, stroke, heart attacks, and more.

Studies show that up to 90 percent of physicians never look for sleep apnea or address its relatively simple treatment during exams because they aren’t aware of it — it wasn’t offered in their medical education program. “Remember, it’s possible you may be the one who initially saves your life, so please take notice of your sleeping habits,” Dr. Klein says.

How do you know if you have sleep apnea? Your sleeping partner has probably threatened to kick you out of bed more than once. Are you a snorer? If your snoring is interrupted by long pauses where you stop breathing for a period, then resume with a loud snort (which may or may not wake you), it’s very likely you have sleep apnea and should be checked. This dangerous sleep pattern is happening to you because your throat is collapsing upon itself, blocking your airway and making it impossible for air to pass from your nose or mouth into your lungs. “Without more air, you can see how the lack of breath is capable of causing death,” cautions Dr. Klein.

In the past, sleep apnea was primarily treated



by placing a CPAP mask, attached to a unit that filters room air to keep the airway open, over one’s face. (Aside from being uncomfortable, this device greatly hindered amorous pursuits!) Today a small, removable appliance is available; it fits inside the mouth much like a dental retainer. It’s more inconspicuous and comfortable than a CPAP, and requires only a minimum amount of care. Many health insurance plans cover these devices.

The appliance is a boon for travelers — especially truck drivers, who are now legally restricted from driving professionally in nearly all 50 states if they have uncontrolled sleep apnea. Dr. Klein has been working with both the U.S. Congress and truck drivers to educate all concerned, helping to reinstate drivers in their jobs.

Beyond sleep apnea, pain and TMJ dysfunction

are also regularly addressed at the Michigan Head & Neck Institute. Patients with severe head and neck pain will find Dr. Klein a comforting resource, for it was his own pain from an auto accident that encouraged him to learn everything he could about pain treatment. “Do you know that after three months, people suffering with chronic pain have chemical changes in their bodies that encourage both men and women to behave as though suffering from PMS?” asks the doctor. Irritability and forgetfulness are NOT normal!

As for dysfunctional TMJ, of the worldwide population that suffers from this condition, 80 percent are women. This disorder of the jaw causes eye, ear, and face pain, as well as dizziness, imbalance, sleeplessness, and teeth-grinding. TMJ is often easily identifiable by a clicking of the jaw when eating or opening the mouth. A simple mouthpiece, similar to those used for sleep apnea, often solves this problem.

Dr. Klein treats all of his patients to a special perk just for scheduling a visit. He offers each a few moments to relax in one of his comfy professional-grade massage chairs. “People with TMJ, pain, or sleep apnea are under stress,” he says. “It’s important to take a deep breath and escape from daily cares.”

And this, too, helps to oxygenate cells.

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