

## No “ZZZs” in apnea

He snored as a child. He snored as an adult. But when **Dwight Holland's** sleep apnea kept his partner awake because she feared he might stop breathing, Holland decided to seek help.

“Mr. Holland had tonsils the size of New York,” says **Dr. Sarah Simpson**, UW clinical assistant professor in internal medicine and Holland's primary care physician.

Dr. Simpson referred Holland to **Dr. Nicole Maronian**, assistant professor of otolaryngology—head and neck surgery at UW Medical Center. They diagnosed him with obstructive sleep apnea, a breathing disorder caused when tissue at the back of the mouth, throat, or nose obstructs airflow during sleep, interrupting air to the lungs for at least 10 seconds. The brain responds by waking up the body to restart breathing.

### Obstructive sleep apnea

“It makes people feel miserable,” says Dr. Maronian. “Some people wake up feeling as tired as they were before going to sleep,” she says.

Concentration problems, depressed moods, and decreased libido are a few side effects sleep apnea causes. It can also cause cardiovascular disease, pulmonary disease, stroke, and sudden death from heart attack. It has been linked to increased risk for hypertension and a higher risk of motor vehicle accidents.



Dr. Nicole Maronian

### Apnea treatment

Dr. Maronian offered Holland a couple of options to treat his sleep apnea. The continuous positive airway pressure machine (CPAP), or the bi-level positive airway pressure machine (BPAP), apply pressure to the airway to keep it open. These devices are portable and consist of a nose and/or mouthpiece held onto the head with straps.



Dwight Holland's feeling great after getting the best sleep he's ever had.

“We're on the upward slope of recognizing sleep apnea as a clinical problem,” says Dr. Maronian, “and specifically how sleep quality affects other medical conditions from immune problems to cardiac issues.”

In 2000, researchers looked at the relationship between snoring and high blood pressure and found that an otherwise healthy individual who snores may have a higher risk of developing high blood pressure later in life.

About 40 million people have chronic sleep problems, ranging from insomnia to obstructive sleep apnea. Twenty million people suffer from obstructive sleep apnea alone.

“My memory is better,” says Holland. “My comprehension is better! These are the biggest changes that good sleep has given me.”

“The device is 100 percent effective if worn every night for the rest of your life,” says Dr. Maronian.

Surgery was Holland's other option. Once the specific sites of obstruction are identified, surgery attempts to widen the airway.

Last summer, Holland chose the CPAP machine.

“It made a world of difference,” he says. “I don't think I ever got good REM (rapid eye movement) sleep before. And now I'm dreaming more than ever.”

In March, 2002, Holland decided to try the surgical route to avoid using the machine every night. Dr. Maronian removed his tonsils and trimmed his soft palate. Holland spent only one night in the hospital. He is ecstatic with the results.

### Easy lifestyle changes for sleep apnea and snoring

- **Get more sleep.** Seven to eight hours of sleep is recommended for a healthy, productive life.
- **Lose weight.** Moderate to severe obesity goes hand in hand with apnea.
- **Get exercise. Keep the body toned.** Limiting fat deposits in the head and neck area will help prevent sleep apnea.
- **Roll over.** To prevent snoring or sleep apnea, try sleeping on your side.
- **Avoid snoring.** Don't eat or drink alcohol or take sedative drugs three hours before sleeping to avoid snoring.

For more information about sleep apnea, please contact your doctor or call the Otolaryngology—Head & Neck Surgery Clinic at 206-598-4022.