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# Health (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health>) What to Know About an At-Home Sleep Test

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Do you find yourself waking up tired, or maybe with a headache or dry mouth? Obstructive sleep apnea (<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org>[https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/adult/respiratory\\_disorders/obstructive\\_sleep\\_apnea\\_134,59](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/adult/respiratory_disorders/obstructive_sleep_apnea_134,59)) could be to blame. This happens when your breathing is interrupted during sleep, often for more than ten seconds.



When you sleep, your muscles relax, including the throat and chest muscles that help you breathe. If you have sleep apnea, relaxation of throat muscles combine with a narrowed airway to interrupt breathing.

At-home sleep apnea testing is an easy, cost-effective way to figure out whether you're having trouble breathing. A home sleep apnea test is a very simplified breathing monitor that tracks your breathing, oxygen levels, and breathing effort while worn. It does not fully capture what is monitored with an overnight sleep study. Overnight sleep studies give a more thorough assessment of sleep issues. They are attended by a sleep technologist and capture many more signals, including brainwaves for sleep, muscle tone, and leg movements. For people with certain heart, breathing, or neuromuscular problems, an overnight sleep study at a sleep center may be better.

An at-home sleep apnea test may be appropriate for you if you have signs of obstructive sleep apnea, such as:

A sleep partner reporting that you snore, snort or gasp while sleeping

Disrupted sleep

Daytime sleepiness

Talk with your clinical provider about your options, especially if you are overweight or obese.

Here's what to know about the test.

## The Facts About At-home Sleep Tests

### 1

#### **They monitor breathing, not actual sleep.**

A sleep test is meant to evaluate a patient for sleep apnea, and it monitors breathing parameters, not the sleep itself. The sleep test won't analyze how long you're in light or deep sleep, for instance. Instead, it will measure pauses in and absence of breathing, how much effort it takes to breathe and whether your breathing is deep or shallow.

### 2

#### **Your doctor needs to prescribe it.**

This isn't an over-the-counter test. Your primary care physician or a physician at a sleep clinic can order it for you to use at home.

### 3

#### **It uses sensors to detect breathing patterns.**

The sensors include a small probe over your finger that measures oxygen levels. You'll insert another mask with tubes into your nostrils and secure it around your ears, similar to an oxygen mask. Other sensors are placed on your abdomen and chest to measure their rise and fall as you breathe.

### 4

## **It's a small commitment.**

Most at-home sleep tests are used just for one night. It's also less expensive than a sleep study conducted in a clinic — anywhere from a third to a fifth of the cost of doing an in-lab study and often covered by insurance.

## **5**

## **It's convenient.**

With an at-home study, you'll be in the comfort of your own surroundings, which can mean a more accurate reading of how you actually sleep.

## **6**

## **It doesn't completely rule out apnea.**

After the test, your results will be reviewed by a sleep technologist and sent to your physician. If symptoms persist, your physician might recommend an in-lab study. Home tests can sometimes be inaccurate: For instance, your sensors might fall off during the night. At a lab, a physician is on-site to monitor you.

## **7**

## **You might have other sleep issues.**

Not all sleep disorders are characterized by breathing trouble. If your symptoms persist, you might not have apnea. Other common sleep issues that don't affect the airways include movement disorders that cause nighttime restlessness or [narcolepsy](#).

([https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/respiratory\\_disorders/narcolepsy\\_85,P01317](https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/healthlibrary/conditions/respiratory_disorders/narcolepsy_85,P01317)), a neurological disorder that affects the body's sleep-wake cycles and causes excessive sleepiness. Your physician can work with you to pinpoint the cause.

## **How can I get accurate results from an at-home sleep test?**

"For the most accurate home sleep apnea reading, it's best to have sleep time on your back and side," Patil says. Sleep apnea is typically worse when sleepers are on their backs, and side sleeping can ease apnea. Knowing what happens when you sleep in different positions can help your doctor pinpoint whether you have apnea or some other sleep issue.

## Request an Appointment

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