



Do you have sleep apnoea? Try this self-test

By Lee Hui Chieh - Jan 26, 2007
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Snorers are now able to screen themselves for sleep apnoea using a self-test strip believed to be the first of its kind.

The Israeli-invented, Singapore-made strip is almost as accurate as a standard sleep study, but cheaper and more convenient.

Its availability may persuade sufferers to get tested. Many currently do not want to spend the time and money to do so. Yet the disorder can cause serious problems such as stroke and even marital discord.

Sleep apnoea causes people with narrowed airways to stop breathing for 10 seconds or longer repeatedly during sleep. It can lead to hypertension, heart disease and stroke. The condition affects about 15 per cent of people here, and 88 per cent of snorers.

Patients can be treated using dental splints, oxygen masks or surgery.

Internationally, 90 per cent of sleep apnoea sufferers go undiagnosed, a figure which prompted the strip's Israeli inventor, Mr Noam Hadas, to develop it.

He said: 'I hope that this way, at least some of them will be detected and get the medical help they so need.'

He chose Singapore company MFS Technology to make the strip over others from China and India because of the quality of its work.

Sleep apnoea is diagnosed with an overnight sleep study, in which wires are placed on the sleeping patient's head and body to monitor

brain waves, eye movements and breathing patterns.

The study is best done in a hospital, but it costs more than \$900. Technicians can hook the patient up at home for a simpler \$600 version. Hospitals can also loan patients a device which resembles a watch, to conduct the test at home, for \$300.

The self-test, called SleepStrip, has three sensors to detect breathing pauses longer than 10 seconds and tracks the number of such episodes.

Users have to sleep with the strip stuck below the nose for at least five hours. They can read the results - 0, 1, 2 or 3 - an hour after removing it.

Those who score zero do not have apnoea. For the rest, the higher the number, the worse the apnoea.

The strip costs \$120 to \$200 and is available from a handful of doctors and dentists.

From March, the Singapore distributor, MeirHealth Asia, will sell the strip via mail order, for \$85. Details will be posted on <http://www.meirhealth.com> next month.

Its marketing manager, Ms Ginny Cheong, said the company could lower the price for customers by selling the SleepStrip directly to them.

Dr Adrian Yap, a dental surgeon in private practice, said he once treated a man whose apnoea was so bad that his wife was divorcing him for earlier refusing to seek treatment. They had not shared a bed in two years.

He said: 'Many people wouldn't blow \$1,000 if they aren't sure they have a problem. The strips will help more people get tested.'

Dr Kevin Soh, an ear, nose and throat specialist at Mount Elizabeth Hospital, uses the strips for patients who are cost-conscious and can speak enough English to follow the instructions on the self-test.

About 40 per cent of his sleep apnoea patients are diagnosed from using the strip. Most do not need a sleep study as the strip gives enough information to proceed with non-surgical treatment, Dr Soh said.

Businessman W.F. Chang, 48, thought he might have apnoea after he fainted on the golf course. His apnoea was so severe that it blocked his air supply even during the day, causing him to faint.

The strip indicated he had the condition, so he went on to do a sleep study and then had surgery.

He said: 'The test is easy to use and lets you know what's happening to you.'

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