

SLEEPING WITH DARTH VADER

By MaryAnne Arcand
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You know how you hear about something but don't really understand it until it happens to you? Well, that's what it's like for me and my man. After years of tolerating each others' snoring and snorting through the night, we both went and got tested for sleep apnea. And wouldn't you know it – we both have it.

Apnea means "without breath." People with obstructive sleep apnea stop breathing in their sleep and their oxygen level drops, depriving the heart and brain of oxygen, which is needed for restful and refreshing sleep. Sleep apnea often causes severe fatigue during waking hours, dulls alertness, and falling asleep during the day, even while driving or sitting at a traffic light.

What happens is your body's muscles naturally relax during sleep. Once your throat muscles relax, your airway narrows or collapses, so air does not get to your lungs and you stop breathing. Tissue in the back of the throat, large tonsils, nasal obstructions and being overweight are some of the causes, which can result in snoring, cessation of breathing, and then gasping for

air, the dead giveaway of obstructive sleep apnea. Hubby says I do that all night, sometimes for 20 seconds at a time.

The major health impact of sleep apnea include severe fatigue, grogginess, loss of concentration, memory loss, depression, sexual dysfunction, and morning headaches. Long-term sleep disorders increase the risk of high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, and long-term fatigue that



causes collisions and work place injuries.

Now here's where it gets interesting. I am, as many of you know, overweight, and have the build typical of a person with sleep apnea. My man, on the other hand, is tall and slim. You'd think I'd be the one who was always tired and lacking energy. But it's him. Through doctor's visits and testing we ruled out all kinds of other medical conditions, and I suggested to our doc that maybe it was sleep apnea. He thought it wouldn't hurt to do the test, but didn't think it would be because of hubby's build. We were all surprised when it turned out he has it. To test for sleep apnea, you are hooked to an "oximeter", a kind of plug that fits over one of your fingers while you sleep, and measures how much oxygen is in your blood. So hubby's test came back that his oxygen level dropped below acceptable levels between 15-20 times per hour. Wow! That explains a few things....

Off we go to the Respiratory Therapist to get him fitted for a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) which is actually a little pump that keeps air flowing through your airway while you sleep. It requires wearing a face mask of some kind. Hubby chose the full face mask because he's used to wearing a respirator for work.

So there we are the first night, the pump going, he's wearing his mask (complete with hose attached to the pump like a snorkel) – and it sounds like I'm sleeping with Darth Vader! There's little blue lights on the pump, which is on our headboard, and the in and out sound of air pressure as he breathes. But...no snoring, snorting or gasping! This is good.

After a week of this, I've gotten used to rolling over in the night and seeing something that looks and sounds like it's from outer space laying next to me. Now it's off to the doc again, to see how things are progressing. And hubby, so thoughtful, says – now you should check HER out – she's worse than me for snoring and stopping breathing. Thanks, dear!

My turn with the oximeter and the results are unbelievable. I quit breathing an average of 78 times per hour! And even when I was breathing, my oxygen levels were below average. So now I get my own machine, and mask. I opt for the little snorkel in the nose deal, which is very comfortable, and the air hose doesn't get in the way like you'd think it would. Even after the first night, I felt better, more refreshed and energetic – and I wasn't exactly short on energy to start with!



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Studies show that 28% of truckers are at risk for sleep apnea, because of the lifestyle. According to Today's Trucking Magazine, American trucking firms are now offering sleep apnea screening and treatment, and are seeing a 30% reduction in incidents due to fatigue after treatment. Untreated sleep apnea leaves your company and/or your employees vulnerable to risk. According to the Consumer Law Page (<http://consumer-lawpage.com/article/sleep-apnea-truck-accident.html>) "Anyone who drives, knowing that they suffer from sleep apnea, is acting recklessly and in conscious disregard for the safety of others. Any trucking company that employs drivers without screening them for sleep apnea is equally reckless. Both should

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be liable for punitive damages for their contempt for public safety, in addition to being responsible for the deaths, injuries and destruction caused by their misconduct."

80% of people with sleep apnea are unidentified and untreated. Estimates say that treating all US drivers who suffer from sleep apnea could potentially save 980 lives per year, and \$11.1 Billion in medical costs and insurance claims.

If your spouse complains that you snore too loud, or even has to go sleep in another room, consider getting yourself checked out. It doesn't hurt, it doesn't even bother that much, and you'll feel better for it. As for me and Darth, well, that'll be Mrs Vander to you. And for Christmas we're going to get a couple of those deely-bopper head bands with the spring antennas on them, and scare the @*# ! out of the grandkids! But at least we'll be feeling good while we do it. Remember, driving if you have sleep apnea is unsafe – and we all know that unsafe is unacceptable. ■



BC Forest Safety Council Warns Winter Driving Conditions Require Better Driving Habits

With frosty weather beginning to hit parts of the province, the BC Forest Safety Council is reminding all drivers to adopt safe winter driving practices.

MaryAnne Arcand, director of the Council's Forestry TruckSafe and Northern Initiatives program, says a number of crashes over the fall season were attributed to changing weather conditions combined with drivers not taking extra precautions.

"Complacency and overlooking simple driving tools and techniques is what gets people hurt," says Arcand. "If we all drive according to the season, we can make it safer for everyone on the roads."

Safe winter driving habits recommended by the Forest Safety Council include:

- slowing down, and giving yourself more time to get where you need to go
- leaving extra space between you and the vehicle in front of you
- using headlights at all times because of shorter daylight hours and potential foggy weather
- replacing windshield wipers because streaky, patchy, partially cleared windows add to drivers' risk

- cleaning off all lights, windows and mirrors in order to see and be seen

Arcand also recommends drivers equip their vehicles with proper snow tires and, especially in the case of truck drivers, carry chains. From October 1 to April 30, it is mandatory for transport trucks to carry chains and the fine for non-compliance is \$121 as well as two points against a driver's license.

"None of us look forward to winter driving conditions, so we put off using season-appropriate driving practices for as long as possible," says Arcand. "No more denial, it's time to change our thinking and adopt safe winter driving habits."

To find out more information about forestry health and safety and the BC Forest Safety Council visit the Council's web site at www.bcforestsafe.org.

The BC Forest Safety Council is a not-for-profit society dedicated to promoting forest health and safety. It was founded and is supported by all major forestry organizations in BC and works with forestry employers, workers, contractors and the provincial government and agencies to implement changes necessary to eliminate fatalities and serious injuries in the forest sector. ■