

People with Epilepsy May Gain from Common Sleep Apnea Treatment

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(HealthDay)—It's been used by many people to help ease sleep apnea, but new research suggests the CPAP mask may also help ease seizures in people with epilepsy.

CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) involves wearing an airflow mask over the nose or mouth each night, to help keep the back of the throat open for better breathing. Many people with epilepsy often have [sleep apnea](#), the researchers said. In fact, of the 197 patients enrolled in the new study, only 75 didn't have sleep apnea.

Poor sleep is also a known risk factor for increased seizure frequency, the research team added.

"Sleep apnea is common in people with epilepsy, but few physicians screen for it," explained lead investigator Dr. Thapanee Somboon, a research fellow at the Cleveland Clinic's Sleep Disorders Center.

"All patients with epilepsy should be checked for sleep disorders, including insomnia and sleep apnea, because there are effective treatments," Somboon said in a news release from the American Epilepsy Society.

His team was to present its findings Saturday at the society's annual meeting, in Washington, D.C.

Among the 122 patients who had both epilepsy and sleep apnea, 73 used the CPAP device each night, while 49 did not.

After about a year, more than 60 percent of the CPAP-treated patients saw a 50 percent or greater drop in seizures, compared with their pre-CPAP days. This compared with just a 14 percent drop for those not using CPAP, the investigators said.

Also, by a number of measures, the team found that 85 percent of those undergoing CPAP experienced a "successful" measure of [seizure](#) control, compared with just 55 percent of those who did not.

Two experts in epilepsy care who reviewed the findings said they make sense. Dr. Fred Lado is Northwell Health's regional director of epilepsy care for Queens and Long Island, N.Y. He called the findings "striking" and said epilepsy specialists should certainly consider sleep apnea tests for their [patients](#).

He added, however, that because this new research isn't the "gold standard" prospective, randomized trial, such a trial may be needed to first confirm these results. And findings presented at medical meetings are also typically considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Dr. Vahid Ghasian directs the Epilepsy Center at Staten Island University Hospital in New York City. He said health experts have long seen links between epilepsy and sleep apnea, and now "accepted practice is to manage both disorders at the same time."

But, as Somboon pointed out, "many people with [epilepsy](#) don't realize they have sleep apnea. Being diagnosed is the first step towards getting effective treatment and potentially decreasing the risk of seizures."

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