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Health news

Snoring can cause problems

A few simple changes in nighttime habits can help snorers kick the habit and begin sleeping better

By Sarah Skidmore
Oregon Daily Emerald

Snoring is an affliction that hurts both the snorers and the people close to them.

While snoring is a seemingly harmless and noisy nighttime habit, it can cause serious problems, said Jolene Siemsen, nurse practitioner at the University Student Health Center. Snoring can interrupt sleep patterns to cause grogginess and fatigue.

Twenty million Americans snore nightly, according to the Columbia University Health Education Program. Snoring is produced by vibrations of the soft palate in

the mouth and is caused by multiple conditions that interfere with a normal breathing pattern.

Colds, allergies, really dry air, swelling of the nasal passages, injuries to the nose that cause a break in the nasal path or tonsil enlargements from infections are all possible causes for snoring, Siemsen said. Snoring is most common while sleeping on your back.

Columbia University recommends a number of options to help snorers with their situation:

To discourage sleeping on your back, try sewing a tennis ball to your pajamas near the small of your back. To prevent muscle relaxation in the mouth and throat, do not drink alcohol, take sleeping pills, antihistamines or tranquilizers before bed. To prevent a dry throat, add humidity to your

room. To align your airway, use extra pillows. To reduce a build-up of mucus, do not eat dairy products before bedtime. You can also try taking a couple spoonfuls of honey daily for a few weeks. Ask a roommate or bedmate to turn you on your side when you begin to snore.

Siemsen recommends a professional medical evaluation if a student is not having restful sleep, if their snoring is getting progressively worse or there are periods when they cease breathing during sleep.

Sleep apnea is a condition which causes a person to cease breathing for short periods during sleep. This condition is most common in obese, middle-aged men with hypertension and is not a primary concern for students, Siemsen said.

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MRI scans may help predict strokes

Daniel Q. Haney
The Associated Press

DALLAS — MRI scans are helping doctors predict whether plaque, the fatty gunk that clogs the arteries, is likely to break open and trigger a heart attack or stroke.

Doctors have long known that heart attacks and strokes typically occur when a lump of plaque on an artery walls bursts. In a misguided attempt at repair, the body forms a clot over the plaque that chokes off the blood supply completely.

Researchers have been delving into what makes some plaque

harmless while other bits are prone to breaking. Now, they are taking steps toward technology that will let them peek inside the plaque to reveal whether it is vulnerable to disaster.

At Sunday's opening of the annual scientific meeting of the American Heart Association, doctors described two new uses of magnetic resonance imaging scans that may at last allow them to distinguish benign plaque from the dangerous.

"Many of us think that the most significant clinical advance in the next five to 10 years will be the

noninvasive imaging of plaque," commented Dr. Jan Breslow of Rockefeller University.

The noninvasive technique involves souping up an ordinary MRI machine to snap super-fast cross-sectional pictures of the beating heart.

Ordinarily, doctors make images of the blood vessels using ultrasound or X-rays that tell them whether they are narrow. But this offers no clue to what the blockages are made of. The MRI pictures reveal the composition of plaque, which is key to predicting whether it is likely to break.

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