

If your partner snores...

...chances are you are sleep deprived and not feeling too sympathetic.

Caroline Hopkins Legaspi offers some insight as well as tips

I love my partner, but the rumbling snores keep me awake. Are there solutions for people like us?

Sharing a bed with someone who snores can be a constant challenge. It's also a common one — up to half of adults in the US snore regularly, some data suggests, and their partners can, naturally, suffer.

If you're struggling to sleep through the noise, experts say the first step to getting some rest is understanding what exactly is causing it.

What leads to snoring?

When the muscles that keep your airway open become relaxed while you sleep, your airway can narrow, causing the soft tissues in your throat to vibrate with each breath, said Daniel Vena, an assistant professor of sleep medicine at Harvard Medical School in the US.

"Those muscles go to sleep when you go to sleep," Vena said. This explains why people often snore after drinking alcohol, which relaxes the same muscles.

People who are overweight or obese tend to snore because extra tissues in the tongue and throat can hinder airflow, Vena said.

Congestion can also constrict your airway, which is why some people snore because of a cold or allergies, said Dr Kuljeet K. Gill, a clinical assistant professor of sleep medicine at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, US.

For partners who snore regularly, the first step is to rule out obstructive sleep apnoea. This is a potentially serious condition that occurs when the airway collapses enough during sleep that it blocks airflow, temporarily pausing breathing and causing people to wake up gasping for air. If left untreated, sleep apnoea can increase the risk for heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

Most people with sleep apnoea snore, Vena said. But not all people who snore have sleep apnoea, so it's important to get a proper diagnosis.

A sleep specialist or an ear, nose and throat doctor should



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be able to help, said Dr Omar G. Ahmed, an ENT sleep surgeon at Houston Methodist Hospital, US.

If your partner does have sleep apnoea, lifestyle changes such as losing weight or quitting smoking — or therapies such as the use of continuous positive airway pressure, or CPAP, machines at night — may not only help the condition but also curtail snoring.

What if it's not sleep apnoea?

If your partner is what Vena calls a "simple snorer", meaning sleep apnoea is not the culprit here, there are other ways to nix the noise.

Discourage mouth breathing. If your partner has a blocked nose, he or she is probably breathing through the mouth instead, Dr Gill said. That can lead to snoring.

To promote nose breathing

while sleeping, your partner can try applying nasal strips or clearing the sinuses with a nasal rinse before bed. If there's a more permanent blockage, such as a deviated septum or nasal polyps, surgery might be an option, Dr Ahmed said.

Promote side sleeping. When you are sleeping on your back, gravity can cause your airway to narrow, which results in snoring, Vena said.

To help your partner stay on their side while sleeping, try placing firm pillows behind his or her back, said Heather E. Gunn, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Alabama in the US. Or you can make rolling over uncomfortable by sewing or duct-taping tennis balls or other objects onto the back of his or her sleepwear, said Wendy Troxel, a senior behavioural scientist at the Rand Corp., a US think tank whose research includes public health.

Tune out the sound. Covering

your ears with a pillow is one way to stifle the noise but you'd most likely need to adjust it throughout the night, Gunn said. Instead, try wearing earplugs, running a fan or playing white noise, she said.

If you aren't easily roused, you can also try heading to bed before your partner so that you're already in a deep sleep when the snoring begins, Troxel said. Practicing good sleep-hygiene techniques, such as avoiding screens or caffeine close to bedtime, can help deepen your sleep, Vena said.

Don't knock the "sleep divorce". If all else fails, try sleeping separately from your partner, perhaps in a spare bedroom (if you have one) or on the couch.

A sleep divorce might seem bad for your relationship at first, Gunn said. But inadequate rest can also sink a relationship, Troxel said. So, as long as you offset the time apart with

quality time together during the day, sleeping separately could be a positive change for your relationship.

What's the bottom line?

Finding a method that works takes teamwork and patience, Troxel said.

Try to avoid discussing the issue in the middle of the night when you're exasperated by your lack of sleep, Gunn said. This can make your partner feel attacked or blindsided by something he or she can't control.

Instead, try gently suggesting these ideas during the day when everyone is likely to be less frustrated.

Approach it "as a 'we' problem with a 'we' solution", Troxel said, rather than as an issue for only your partner to fix.

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