

Snore no more

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SNORING is the noise made during sleep when the sleeper forces air past any obstructions in the upper airway and causes the soft tissue there to vibrate. Statistics show that 45% of all adults snore occasionally while 25% are habitual snorers.

While snorers may argue that they're not bothering anyone, their sleeping partners beg to differ. According to a study by the British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association, partners of snorers are kept awake two hours each night, losing some two years' of sleep over the average course of a marriage. No wonder up to 80% of couples end up sleeping in different rooms!

Snoring is aggravated by a small jaw, obesity, sinusitis, smoking, alcohol, tranquilisers, sleeping pills, a flabby soft palate or uvula, and an enlarged tongue.

Any snoring is a sign that breathing is disrupted. It can lead to sleep apnoea, a disorder that causes people to stop breathing for 10 to 30 seconds at a time while they are sleeping. Quite often, it's the partner who recognises the symptoms.

Most people dismiss snoring as nothing to worry about. But if you wake up tired and work performance is affected, then it needs medical attention.

Yap Ming Tian was well aware that he was a snorer, but last year, it became so bad that he would wake up in the middle of the night, gasp-

A new device is said to arrest potentially-dangerous snoring and sleep apnoea.



Help for sufferers: Yap Ming Tian, who was a snorer, introduced Somnoguard here.

ing for breath. This happened several times a night and, in the process, it woke his wife up as well.

During a visit to London to see his daughter six months ago, Yap experienced the same restless sleep. His daughter, who's a doctor, instantly recognised it as apnoea.

Snoring and sleep apnoea cost the United States' economy US\$88.4bil (RM309.4bil) per year.

Apnoea sufferers are often diagnosed when they are simply exhausted and can't function properly. Experts say most don't even know they have it. But it's as common as diabetes and wakes you from deep sleep, rendering you tired the next day.

Apnoea is potentially life-threatening as it raises blood pressure, reduces the flow of oxygen to the brain and can, at worst, lead to stroke, heart attack and even death. Sufferers have been known to experience impaired mental abilities, emotions and work performance. It can cause memory problems, weight gain, impotence and headaches. Interestingly, Viagra worsens obstructive sleep apnoea.

There are many ways to treat the condition by using herbal tonics and sprays, drugs or mandibular advancement devices. Conventional methods use nasal continuous positive airway pressure devices; at the most, doctors may recommend surgery.

Yap's daughter made a search on the Internet and saw a mandibular device, called the Somnoguard, that

she felt suited her father's needs.

The Somnoguard is made from a flexible material and resembles dentures. It can be fitted by the user himself or a dentist.



The Somnoguard, which looks like a pair of dentures, allows the respiratory tract to open up further.

The fitting involves boiling the mouldable thermoplastic, cooling it and inserting it into the mouth for the correct fit and bite.

Developed in Germany by medical enterprise Tomed Dr Toussaint GmbH in co-operation with ENT (ear, nose and throat) university clinic Mannheim, the device serves to shift the lower jaw forward dur-

ing sleep. This allows the respiratory tract to open up further.

Advancement of the lower jaw up to 12mm with 0.5mm accuracy is made with the adjustment of a screw on the device.

Clinical examinations in the Mannheim sleep lab have shown that snoring in 80% of patients disappeared completely or almost completely with the use of this oral device. The rate of dangerous nocturnal breathing arrests was reduced by up to 60%.

The device can be remoulded up to 10 times and fits various mouth sizes. It takes first-time users about 10 minutes to fit. It's even usable by people with some missing teeth or those who grind their teeth as the device gives the user's jaw some lateral movement.

When Yap first tried the device, he slept soundly for the first time in years. He has since decided to be the distributor of the device to help fellow sufferers in Malaysia.

It has a lifespan of two years and costs RM630, which works out to 86 sen per night. "That's about the price of a *roti canai*," says Yap.

Approved by European health authorities and the United States Food and Drug Administration, the device is convenient and can be stored easily when travelling. The only setback is, it can't be used by those with no teeth!

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