


on call kids' health



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Nighttime noisemaker

Q *My son snores almost every night—and loudly. Could there be something wrong with him?*

Any snoring should be brought to your doctor's attention, but it's not only the frequency or noise that concerns us—it's the way a child breathes when he snores. Does yours seem to be working too hard to do it (using his chest muscles, for instance)? Does he ever choke or gasp as he sleeps? If so, he could have obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), a condition in which breathing is blocked during sleep. It can affect kids from toddlerhood on up (adults, too, can suffer from it). OSA can cause fussiness, behavioral, cognitive, and learning problems; poor growth; and headaches. The most common causes of it are large tonsils and/or adenoids and obesity; the latter is becoming a factor at an earlier age these days. I've even seen it in preschoolers.

Overly fussy? It may be linked to snoring

depends on the cause: removing the tonsils when they're too large, and starting a weight-loss program for kids who are overweight. For obese kids, a special machine with a mask to support nighttime breathing can be helpful.

My son Zachary had terrible OSA when he was 4, caused by huge tonsils. My husband and I used to take turns repositioning him in the night just so he could breathe. Then we took him to a specialist (an otolaryngologist) who promptly took out his tonsils. This cured him, and the sudden quiet from his room at night was almost unnerving!

Sometimes the diagnosis can be made by the history that parents give the doctor (an audio recording or videotape of your child's nighttime breathing can be worth a thousand words), along with a physical examination. But if it's not entirely clear, a sleep study, in which the child is monitored overnight—in either a hospital or at home—may be recommended. The treatment

