Is There a Link Between Sleep Apnea and Migraines?

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Often, one health issue triggers another. For example, recent findings show that sleep apnea can provoke migraines and these painful, frequent headaches can make this sleep disorder, and others like it, worse, according to new findings from the Chronic Migraine Epidemiology and Outcomes (CaMEO) inquiry recently revealed at the Congress of the European Academy of Neurology (EAN) 2017, reports Medscape.com.

For the study, researchers sent invitations to 16,763 participants solicited from a group of men and women with an average age of about 42, who responded to an online survey about migraines. (Of those who replied, 12,810 provided valid information.) Scientists divided respondents into two categories: those struck by episodic migraine, or EM (fewer than 15 days per month), and folks hammered by chronic migraine, or CM (15 or more days per month. (Participants with EM numbered 11,699 and 1,111 experienced CM.) All those involved in the study completed baseline and three-month follow-up surveys from now and extending through 1.5 years.

Researchers noted that among individuals who reported having been diagnosed with sleep apnea, almost 75 percent suffered from EM and about 83 percent endured CM. In addition, findings showed that the patients with CM fared worse on all measurements of sleep quality, such as snoring, sleepiness during the day and whether participants scored sufficient zzz's.

"It may be worthwhile to start asking our patients about this," said Dawn C. Buse, PhD, a licensed clinical psychologist and associate professor in the department of neurology at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in New York City, the researcher who presented the results at the scientific gathering. "We haven't tested this yet, but the hope is that if sleep apnea is associated with more frequent headaches, treating sleep apnea might benefit headache."

Scientists also remarked that the risk of sleep apnea for both men and women correlated with body mass index, or BMI (a measurement of body fat based on weight-to-height ratio): The higher the BMI the greater the risk. (The risk was greatest for obese participants.)

Buse reminded the audience that the key to better quality sleep requires that people go to bed and wake up at the same time, limit devices in the bedroom and engage in exercise and relaxation.

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