

Veterans Affairs – Palo Alto Health Care System (VAPAHCS)
Uncomplicated Obstructive Sleep Apnea
VAPAHCS Pulmonary Sleep Medicine

What is obstructive sleep apnea?

Obstructive sleep apnea is when the upper airway repeatedly becomes blocked during sleep. When this happens, the amount of air reaching the lungs is limited. On sleep studies, we look for repeated episodes of complete (apnea) or partial airway obstruction (hypopnea) with an associated decrease in oxygen level.

What is uncomplicated obstructive sleep apnea?

Uncomplicated obstructive sleep apnea means that a person is a good candidate for the portable sleep studies available at the VAPAHCS. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends portable sleep studies for people who:

1. Referring provider suspects obstructive sleep apnea
2. Do not have heart failure, lung disease or neurologic problems influencing their breathing
3. Do not use significant narcotic pain medications that might change breathing patterns during sleep
4. Do not use supplemental oxygen
5. Do not have significant other sleep related disorders
6. Can adequately apply the portable sleep study equipment

What are the different types of sleep studies?

Sleep studies can be either performed in a sleep lab (aka in-lab sleep studies) or performed in a location of the patient's choosing, including home (aka portable sleep studies).

In-lab sleep studies typically have the most sensors monitored. These studies not only look at breathing, but also include sensors measuring brain waves, eye movements and muscle tone. The number of sensors requires sleeping overnight in a sleep lab with a technician monitoring. Many people will not sleep at home during the in-lab sleep study, but the added sensors and technician supervision can provide more precise diagnostic information in complicated cases. In-lab sleep studies are typically used when there is significant heart, lung or neurologic disorders or when a non-obstructive sleep apnea diagnosis is suspected.

Portable sleep studies are simpler versions of in-lab sleep studies. The sensors for portable sleep studies are directed to look at breathing and the effect of breathing changes on heart rate and oxygen levels. The sensors for portable sleep studies measure airflow through your nose and mouth, breathing efforts, oxygen levels, heart rate, movements and EKG. The sensors are made easy enough that after receiving education from a technician, the sensors can be placed on later when the patient is alone.

What should I do if I suspect that I am not a good candidate for a portable sleep study?

Discuss your concerns with your health care team. Since only portable sleep studies and care coordination with portable sleep study results is available at the VAPAHCS, you may be a candidate for a non-VA provider to take over your sleep evaluation, sleep testing and subsequent follow-up care.

What can I expect from a non-VA provider if referred?

You can expect comprehensive, longitudinal care including from the non-VA provider in the community, including:

1. An initial face-to-face consultation
2. Sleep testing as indicated
3. Follow-up clinic visits to discuss any testing and plans of care
4. Direct coordination with VA Prosthetics and VA Pharmacy if any equipment or medications are needed