



According to [millionhearts.hhs.gov](http://millionhearts.hhs.gov), approximately 1.5 million heart attacks and strokes happen in the United States each year. While anyone can develop heart disease, people with high blood pressure, high cholesterol and who smoke are at higher risk. Knowing and modifying your risk factors can lower your risk of becoming a statistic. Regular exercise, healthy eating and not smoking are all great ways to improve your heart health, but did you know that there is also a strong link between heart health and sleep?

Undiagnosed or untreated obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) has been shown to be a major cause of high blood pressure, which is risk factor for both heart attacks and strokes. Research shows that up to 50% of people with OSA also have high blood pressure. Obstructive sleep apnea is also often associated with obesity, which is another risk factor for heart disease.



How does obstructive sleep apnea cause heart problems? When you suffer from OSA, you stop breathing many times during the night which causes your oxygen levels fall. When this happens repeatedly, your brain sends messages to your body to “tighten up” the blood vessels so that an increased flow of oxygen can be delivered to your heart and brain. This reaction causes your blood pressure to unnaturally increase during sleep. Unfortunately, this increase in blood pressure can sometimes continue during the day. People with untreated obstructive sleep apnea can also develop atrial fibrillation (an irregular heart beat) and heart failure.

Fortunately, obstructive sleep apnea is a risk factor for heart disease that you CAN control. If you want to learn more about symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea, diagnosis or treatment options, you should make an appointment with your doctor.

CRANBERRY PROFESSIONAL PARK | 201 SMITH DRIVE, SUITE E

CRANBERRY TOWNSHIP, PA 16066 | 724.772.1750 | [www.breathepa.org](http://www.breathepa.org)