



best of WINNER

KAREN WILLIAMSON, DDS, PA

When Dr. Karen Williamson met and married the man of her dreams there was one big problem—his snoring! She told herself she could learn to live with it, but soon realized neither of them were getting the sleep they needed.

“Dr. Ron Perkins had recently spoken to me about sleep apnea, so I referred my husband to him,” she said. “Dr. Perkins began oral appliance therapy for him and, within the first week, his snoring stopped. He was feeling better and had more energy, and I was able to get a good night’s sleep, too.”

While wearing the appliance, they continued to look for other solutions and Dr. Williamson’s husband eventually underwent nasal surgery. But the experience helped her realize that after 30 years of practicing dentistry, a family dentist could be the first line of defense screening for sleeping issues. “Everything in your mouth can have an effect on how well you breathe, and how well you breathe at night determines how well you sleep and how well your body is able to repair during deep sleep,” Dr. Williamson said.

Dr. Williamson had learned very little in dental school about recognizing sleep breathing issues, but she came to see—as many of her colleagues are also seeing—that a patient leaned back in the dentist’s chair is in the perfect position for the signs and symptoms of sleep issues to become evident.

Dr. Williamson began connecting the dots, recognizing that many of the patients she saw who had signs of acid reflux on their teeth also had obstructive sleep apnea. The same with many of her patients with high blood pressure and many who grind their teeth. She sought out continuing education classes about recognizing sleep issues and joined a study group of other professionals interested in obstructive sleep apnea including a pediatrician, an ENT, an orthodontist, a pediatric dentist, and other general dentists. They began meeting to study sleep breathing disorders and to learn from one another.

“It’s important that people understand just because you don’t snore, it doesn’t mean you don’t have sleep apnea,” she said. “In fact, one in five adults have mild obstructive sleep apnea whether they snore or not. So do 80 to 90 percent of people with diabetes and a large percentage of people who’ve had strokes. Scientists have also found a strong link between sleep disorders and anxiety and depression.”

AT HER ROCKWALL OFFICE, DR. KAREN WILLIAMSON OFFERS A FULL MENU OF GENERAL, RESTORATIVE, AND COSMETIC DENTISTRY FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY:

- EMERGENCY DENTAL CARE
- LASER DENTISTRY
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- TOOTH EXTRACTION
- SAME-DAY CROWNS (CEREC)
- WISDOM TOOTH REMOVAL
- BIOCLEAR BONDING PROCEDURES
- PINHOLE GUM REJUVENATION

Some of the symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea might surprise you, including:

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- ADD and ADHD
- Seasonal Allergies
- Weight Gain
- GERD (Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease)
- Heart Conditions
- Thyroid Trouble
- Arthritis
- Eczema/Dry Skin
- Vertigo
- Tinnitus (Ringing in the Ears)
- Frequent Ear Infections

If you frequently experience some—not necessarily all—of the following, you may also have sleep issues.

- Tossing and Turning
- Teeth Grinding
- Morning Headache
- Restless Leg Syndrome
- Fibromyalgia
- Memory Issues
- Frequent Trips to the Bathroom
- Afternoon Sleepiness
- Waking in the Middle of the Night

Dr. Williamson looks for other signs in the mouth, such as a scalloped tongue which tells her the tongue is pressing against the teeth because it doesn’t have enough room in the mouth.

“There’s a myth that if you’re young and thin you can’t have sleep apnea,” Dr. Williamson said. “But sleep apnea is something that can affect anyone, and the symptoms can be so gradual we often



PROSOMNUS (IA) SLEEP AND SNORE DEVICE

BY MEREDITH KNIGHT

don’t notice them in the early stages. I’m seeing very young children struggling with allergy issues and ear infections due to misaligned teeth. If we can get them to an orthodontist to correct the position of their teeth and jaw, we can often prevent them from becoming adults with severe sleep apnea.”

“Sleep is one of the most important jobs our bodies do,” Dr. Williamson said. “Many of us are aging earlier because of chronic inflammation in the body and one of the largest contributors to chronic inflammation is sleep apnea.”

Dr. Williamson invested in a WatchPat at-home sleep study device which her patients can take home to screen for breathing issues in the comfort of their own home. “The WatchPat is FDA-approved and is medical grade,” she said. “Patients love the simplicity and ease of wearing the WatchPat for their sleep study. They simply wear it while they sleep for one night and the results are read by a board-certified sleep physician, often sending a report back the next day.”

If a condition of sleep apnea is determined, Dr. Williamson discusses with her patient options for care including oral devices called mandibular advancement splints or a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine.

These two options are used to begin therapy which often leads to grand improvements. Depending on the severity of their sleep issues, the patient’s primary doctor may recommend any num-

ber of other steps, including seeing an ENT to evaluate for other treatments, or orthodontics if misaligned teeth are interfering with proper breathing.

Dr. Williamson sees people suffering from sleep apnea every day and many of them have no idea. If you suspect you or a loved one may have obstructive sleep apnea, contact Dr. Williamson at Staff@KarenWilliamsonDDS.com and she’ll send you a free book “The Eight Hour Sleep Paradox” by Dr. Mark Burhenne. “This book outlines steps for receiving care, if you think you have sleep apnea or have been recently diagnosed,” Dr. Williamson said.

To be continued...

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