

Flinders sleep experts try new tactic to fight fatigue

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Sleep apnoea. Credit: Shutterstock.

In a world-first, sleep experts from Flinders University are attempting to fight fatigue caused by insomnia and obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) by treating the two conditions at the same time.

Led by internationally-renowned sleep disorder specialists Professor Doug McEvoy and Professor Leon Lack, the study aims to treat both conditions, providing fresh hope for the thousands of people who experience severe fatigue and daytime sleepiness as a result of suffering both conditions (co-morbidity).

OSA occurs when the walls of the throat close together during sleep, blocking off the upper airway and producing frequent, brief stops in breathing. When the brain registers a drop in oxygen it sends a wake-up call, resulting in a fragmented sleep that causes excessive [daytime sleepiness](#), poor concentration and a range of other health problems including [high blood](#)

[pressure](#) and heart disease.

About a third of people with insomnia have OSA, and a third of people with OSA have insomnia, yet Professor Lack said no other sleep clinic in the world has tried to treat OSA and insomnia as co-morbid conditions.

"People with OSA go through lots of brief periods of breathing cessation – they might have hundreds of episodes a night – and each episode produces an arousal effect, which means they are extremely fatigued throughout the day," Professor Lack said.

"OSA is successfully treated with the continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) mask, which uses mild air pressure to keep the airways open, but people with insomnia are very protective of their sleep – they try to do everything they can to maximise their chance of getting to sleep and staying asleep," he said.

"Consequently, having insomnia may make the treatment of the co-morbid OSA more difficult and less successful."

Professor Lack said the team is currently recruiting patients in a world-first clinical trial at the Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health, based at the Repatriation General Hospital in Daw Park, which aims to treat the two conditions simultaneously.

"The comorbidity of insomnia and OSA has only been recognised fairly recently, so very few [sleep](#) clinics around the world take a multidisciplinary approach.

"The vast majority of clinics deal with OSA but if the patient has both OSA and insomnia there are very few resources to treat it.

"People with [insomnia](#) and OSA are vulnerable to increased health risks as a result of sleepiness and fatigue – left untreated these conditions can be

quite dangerous so we're hoping that by treating two conditions concurrently, we can improve their quality of life and reduce the health risks."

More information: Online screening forms for the trial are available here:

www.adelaidesleephealth.org.au/

Provided by Flinders University

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