Snoring

My husband snores so loudly, he wakes me up. I have listened to him, and he will stop breathing every so often, and then start up again. I moved to the other bedroom, but I can still hear him and I feel kind of mean leaving him. We have been married for 35 years. Is there any help?

Snoring is a very common problem. The vibration of soft tissues at the back of the nose and mouth causes it—sometimes just changing positions helps. Your husband, though, sounds as if he may have sleep apnea, which can be more serious than just ordinary snoring. You say he stops breathing, then starts up again. Sleep apnea is seen most commonly in men, affecting up to 9 percent of them. The soft tissue at the back of the mouth rattles around and creates the snoring sounds. When it plugs off the airway, the breathing stops until rising carbon dioxide levels in the blood cause a kind of gasp that unplugs the airway and the snoring recommences. This ruins both his sleep and yours, and he may complain of fatigue as much as you do. Sleep apnea is seen most commonly in obese, hypertensive males who like to drink a lot. Not all patients fit this mold, however, as there may be a particularly long uvula or a small airway. A sleep specialist should probably be consulted. Helpful interventions may be to have the doctor give a trial of nasal continuous positive pressure airway flow. This is an apparatus that blows air through a small plastic pipe into the nose. Other options may include a jaw device the fits over the teeth and advances the jaw. The dentist can make one for him. There is also an operation to reduce the nasopharyngeal tissue at the back of the throat.

Of course, if he is overweight, hypertensive or diabetic, control of these issues may bring great relief. Do encourage your husband to seek help B there are things out there that can make a real difference.