

# Snoring cures examined

Will snoring remedies help you get a good night's sleep? We put a selection to the test

If someone in your house snores, you may have tried an over-the-counter snoring remedy. But according to a Which? survey and trial (see opposite), users often have little or no success with these products.

Snoring is caused by the airway at the back of the throat narrowing (see diagram, right), but there can be several reasons for this, including excess weight and sleeping position. In a few cases, snoring is down to anatomy, such as a misshapen nose, and some people snore as they age or in pregnancy.

Snoring can be a symptom of sleep apnoea (see p40) – in its most serious cases, the airway closes completely for a few seconds, which stops breathing. Left untreated, it could lead to health problems including heart disease and stroke.

Some of the aids we bought stated that they were unsuitable for people with sleep apnoea, but only the 'Singing for Snorers' CD explained the symptoms.

It's important to find out why you snore before buying a snoring aid (see p40). And you may snore for several reasons – so buying a single 'cure' may not solve your problem.

## Body of evidence

We asked experts to look at the manufacturer evidence supporting products – they concluded it was often patchy, or not available. Experts tell us that, while some types of aid have a good basis in science, some specific brands, such as Snore No More, have no direct evidence yet to support their claims.

Even where there is evidence to support a product, this doesn't mean it will

help all users, as snoring occurs in different ways. 48% of snoring aid users in our survey tried nasal strips, but only 19% of those found the strips very or fairly effective. This isn't surprising, as most people don't snore because of a nasal problem.

Dr Adrian Williams, a consultant respiratory and sleep physician, says: 'Over-the-counter products need well-conducted research specifically on snorers, and manufacturers should avoid exaggerated claims that raise hopes without good enough evidence.'

## Our research

We surveyed 1,981 Which? online panel members about their snoring experiences and snoring aids in February 2009. We selected over-the-counter product types that members had tried and asked seven couples, each with a snorer assessed as suitable, to try one of the products.

The supporting evidence for products sent to us by manufacturers was assessed by: Dr Adrian Williams, consultant respiratory and sleep physician; Professor Janet Wilson, professor of ear, nose, throat, head and neck surgery; Catherine Thompson, senior lecturer and respiratory physiotherapist; Dr Ama Johal, senior clinical lecturer and consultant orthodontist; and Professor Peter Houghton, professor of pharmacognosy (medicinal plant chemicals).



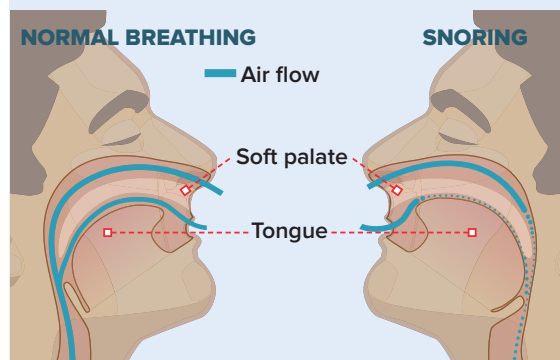
**Which.co.uk**

Don't be swayed by snoring claims in adverts for mattresses. Visit [www.which.co.uk/mattresses](http://www.which.co.uk/mattresses) for a jargon-free buying guide.



## What causes it?

Snoring occurs when the airway in the throat is narrowed and the soft tissues, such as the soft palate and airway walls, vibrate.



PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; ILLUSTRATION: JESSE BROWN

**77%**

of Which? members live in a house where someone snores

**59%**

in those households have their sleep interrupted regularly by snoring

**71%**

who have tried over-the-counter snoring aids found them not very or not at all effective

**23%**

of members often sleep in a different room from their partner because of snoring

## SNORE CALM CHIN-UP STRIPS (£13.99/30)

### Martin Strudwick and Clare Parry

**Design** A plaster around the chin to keep the mouth shut.

**Claim** They 'stop snoring for patients whose snoring results from mouth breathing'.

**Verdict** Dr Williams and Dr Johal accept the principle of holding the mouth closed to prevent snoring, but say the manufacturer of these strips hadn't provided research showing they work on their own. Dr Johal notes there is



only good research showing that Snore Calm strips and Breathe Right strips used together are effective.

Martin says he snored less but suspected this was only because he was awake longer due to discomfort.

## BREATHE RIGHT NASAL STRIPS (£13.95/30)

### Nicholas and Clair Humphrey

**Design** A tape worn above the tip of the nose to pull nasal passages open.

**Claim** They 'reduce or eliminate snoring'.

**Verdict** Evidence shows that these strips improve air flow through the nose, but our panel criticised the maker's claim that this necessarily reduces snoring. Prof Wilson says they will only help the 15-20% who snore because



of a nasal problem, but Dr Williams thinks they may help other snorers, too.

Clair says that the volume and intensity of Nicholas's snoring decreased, but it still kept her awake.

## SNOREMENDER (£49.99)

### Peter and Claire Burgess

**Design** Removable dental device that holds the lower jaw forward, drawing the tongue forward to open the airway.

**Claim** 'Stops snoring for the majority of testers'; 'changed the life for the majority of the patients'.

**Verdict** Our experts say dental devices are the most reliable solution for tongue and possibly nasal-based snoring. But Dr Williams and Dr Johal consider claims are



based on flawed research – for instance, the device wasn't tolerated for daily use by 42% of testers.

Peter and Claire say it reduced his snoring, but he didn't like having something in his mouth and wouldn't use it again.

## SINGING FOR SNORERS CD (£42)

### James Ventham and Kevin O'Dwyer

**Design** A three-month singing exercise programme.

**Claim** 'Specifically designed to tone the muscles at the sites most relevant to snorers'.

**Verdict** It's being tested with people who have sleep apnoea, and a trial including general snorers is planned. Dr Williams feels the company is ethical in 'offering aims not claims' until research is complete. There's no way of



assessing whether snoring is caused by untuned muscles.

Combining the programme with diet and exercise, James found real improvements in the volume and frequency of his snoring after six weeks. Kevin is sleeping better, too.

## LLOYDS PHARMACY STOP SNORING DEVICE (£9.99)

### Carole and Bob Scott

**Design** An electronic device worn on the wrist. When it has detected sound in the room three times, it sends a weak electrical impulse so the snorer changes position without waking.

**Claim** 'Clinically proven to reduce snoring.'

**Verdict** Catherine Thompson and Dr Williams accept the theory of prompting a snorer lying on their back to change position, but they say that the information given about this product's study was insufficient



for them to be confident in its positive findings.

Carole says she was woken up (one night about 20 times), causing sleepiness the next day, and was left with marks on her arm as the pads on the electrodes didn't stay in place.

## SNORE NO MORE (£13.49)

### Stuart and Renée Sheinman

**Design** A light, looped metal wire device that fits inside the nostrils and opens them up – known as a nasal valve dilator.

**Claim** It 'does not correct the cause of snoring, even though it may help reduce the noise'.

**Verdict** Dr Williams thinks it may help noses with nostrils that tend to collapse on sniffing, but there was no research to support its claims, although the maker says a trial is planned. Prof Wilson says such devices can dislodge during sleep.



At first, Stuart didn't like inserting the device so far into his nose. It initially reduced his snoring, but the effect diminished each night.

If your nose is stuffy or congested, our panel recommend trying a steroid-based spray.

## HELPS STOP SNORING THROAT SPRAY (£11.99/19ml)

### Lawrence Hudson and Cathy Neal

**Design** A spray that stops the tissues of the soft palate and back of the throat vibrating by lubricating and toning them.

**Claim** 'Clinically proven to help reduce or eliminate snoring for four out of five testers'.

**Verdict** Our experts have concerns about the research. Dr Williams' view is that it's 'flawed at best'. Prof Wilson looked in detail at the results and believes the spray could work on 20-30% of users. Prof Houghton says



bigger studies are needed. It's unclear how the product works – eg, essential oils aren't generally viewed as lubricants, as they evaporate.

Cathy says Lawrence's snoring was a little quieter at times; he found the taste awful, so wouldn't use it again.

## Why you snore

**It's important to find out the cause of your snoring before looking for a solution**

### ■ OBSERVATION

Ask someone to watch you when you're snoring. If you snore on your back, you may be a tongue-based snorer (where the tongue falls back and impedes your airway). If you have your mouth open, you may be a mouth-based snorer – air is hitting your throat. A nasal snorer's nostrils tend to collapse on sniffing, and breathing is difficult – but a congested nose can also cause this. There could be more than one reason for your snoring.

### ■ SLEEP APNOEA

If your snoring is severe, it's important to establish whether you have sleep apnoea – symptoms are often excessive sleepiness during the day and episodes where you stop breathing or choke. Go to your GP if you or a partner witness symptoms. You may be referred to a clinic for a sleep study. If you are diagnosed with sleep apnoea, think about linking up with patient



groups (see 'Contacts', below for details).

### ■ LIFESTYLE CHANGE

If your snoring doesn't suggest sleep apnoea, try making lifestyle changes. Stop smoking, exercise and improve your diet (fat in the neck commonly squeezes the airway). If you want to try a snoring aid, consider why you snore when picking one. The British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association website has tests to help you find suitable products.

### ■ MEDICAL HELP

If snoring doesn't improve, talk to your GP or dentist. They may refer you to a specialist, such as an ear, nose and throat consultant.

### ■ STAVE OFF SURGERY

Most operations correct structural problems in the nose or throat, or remove excess tissue. Procedures can be painful, results can vary and it isn't easy to predict who'll benefit. There's quite a high recurrence of snoring after initial improvement.



## Contacts

**British Snoring and Sleep Apnoea Association**

01737 245638  
www.britishtsnoring.co.uk

**NHS Choices** [www.nhs.uk/conditions/snoring/pages/introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/snoring/pages/introduction.aspx)

**Sleep Apnoea Trust** 0845 606 0685; [www.sleep-apnoea-trust.org](http://www.sleep-apnoea-trust.org)