

What is Sleep Apnoea?

Sleep apnoea is a condition where a person's throat intermittently blocks off during sleep - either completely (apnoea) or partially (hypopnoea). They may wake briefly or they may not; they may wake up choking or they are not aware of it at all. A partner may notice what is happening. In the case of severe sleep apnoea, sleep can be interrupted many times during the night. The result may be abnormal daytime sleepiness, and even slightly clouded thinking, which does create a significant rail safety issue. The onset of the condition is gradual, so most people do not notice symptoms and frequently deny them as they see themselves as perfectly normal, when in reality they are not.

Common may symptoms include:

- Snoring
- Restless sleep (tossing and turning)
- Gasping or choking when waking
- Tiredness when waking in the morning

Sleep Apnoea and the Rail Standards

The examination of Category 1 and 2 workers examines sleep disorders as a condition that is "likely to affect attentiveness to the task". As part of the rail medical assessment, the examination will measure your BMI (height & weight). Blood pressure and diabetes will also be considered as part of the overall assessment as will a number of other conditions. The StopBang Questionnaire and Epworth Score will also be considered. If the Doctor has assessed you as being at risk due to clinical markers or risk factors, you will be declared Fit for Duty Subject to Review and a sleep study will be requested.

What Happens Next?

You will receive a referral letter from the Doctor via email, asking you to provide further information in line with the Rail Standards. In the case of a clinical marker or risk factor indicating sleep apnoea, you will need to arrange a sleep study which in the first instance should be an "In Home" study.

If the result of the sleep study does not indicate a sleep disorder, you will either be deemed Fit for Duty or Fit for Duty Subject to Review. If the result of the sleep study does indicate a sleep disorder, there are a number of possible paths. If you are being assessed against a Category 1 or Category 2 Rail Medical and you have severe sleep apnoea you will be Temporarily Unfit until the condition is treated, controlled and you are compliant with treatment. This can normally be done in 5 to 6 weeks. A sleep specialist review will also be required at some point thereafter. If you have mild or moderate sleep apnoea but there has been an incident or other evidence of sleep apnoea syndrome the same path will be followed. If you have mild or moderate sleep apnoea but no evidence of syndrome then you will be fit subject to review with possibly more frequent medical review.

Treatment is usually via CPAP which keeps the pressure in the airway high during sleep so it does not collapse. CPAP machines can monitor effectiveness of treatment and usage of the machine. Satisfactory compliance includes use of the machine for a minimum of 4 hours per night on at least 80% of nights, and printouts will be requested to demonstrate both control and compliance. Once treatment is satisfactory you will be Fit Subject to Review with a further medical assessment in 12 months and a further printout required.

It must be remembered that the Rail Medical standards are a legal standard. To be a rail safety worker you are required to manage all medical conditions, including sleep apnoea, as per that standard. Doctors and indeed the Rail Operator are also bound by that standard, with minimal flexibility.

You are encouraged to speak with your General Practitioner to assist you to understand and manage your condition.

Under the Rail Standards, treatment for conditions is not covered by employers or Jobfit. However the cost of the sleep study itself may be covered depending on the Rail Operator. Please speak to your employer to determine if you are expected to cover the cost of the sleep study yourself.

What is a Home Sleep Study?

At Home Sleep Studies are a convenient option for people, as opposed to going to a laboratory or hospital. This involves taking a device home with you to monitor your sleep activity and quality in your own bed. You will need to affix electrodes and an oximeter to you before you fall asleep - you will be shown how to apply the equipment by a sleep technician.

As a general rule, you should avoid caffeine and naps during the day, as well as excessive alcohol and refrain from eating a large meal before bed.

Sleep Study Providers

Jobfit Health Group recommends you undertake a Home Sleep Study. We have listed various providers below where you can arrange this.

CLM Sleep Co

Primarily based in South Australia, this company is a dedicated sleep apnoea solutions provider and arrange an at home sleep study.

Website: <http://www.clmsleep.com/>

Phone: 1300 256 753

Email: admin@clmsleep.com

ResSleep

This company has various clinics across Australia and provides a complete offering of sleep apnoea solutions, including at home sleep studies.

Website: <https://www.ressleep.com.au/>

Phone: 1300 925 387

Email: info@ressleep.com.au

Centurion Healthcare

Primarily located in New South Wales and Victoria, Centurion provide in clinic sleep studies and CPAP solutions.

Website: <https://www.centurionhealthcare.com.au/>

Phone: 02 9798 2322 or 03 9017 3631

Email: reception@centurionhealth.com.au

Air Liquide Healthcare

Australia's leading supplier of respiratory care services, offering sleep apnoea therapy services to individuals.

Website: <https://www.airliquidehealthcare.com.au/>

Phone: 1300 360 202

Email: sleepstudy@healthysleep.net.au

C-Pap & Sleep Central Coast

Operating across 3 clinics on the New South Wales Central Coast and providing at home sleep study options.

Phone: 02 4359 2259 (Manning Park)

Phone: 02 4990 3222 (Cessnock)

Phone: 02 4939 4777 (Greenhills)

Jobfit can provide a referral form directly to these clinics on the Central Coast for you.

**If you have any questions,
please contact Jobfit Health Group
on 1300 61 61 65**