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## Throat Exercises Can Relieve Sleep Apnea

By [ANAHAD O'CONNOR](#)

### THE FACTS

For people suffering from [sleep apnea](#), specialized breathing machines are the standard [treatment](#).

The machines use a method called continuous positive airway pressure, or CPAP, which keeps the airway open and relieves potentially dangerous pauses in breathing during the night. But the machines are expensive, and some people complain that the mask and headgear cause uncomfortable side effects, like [congestion](#).

One free and fairly simple alternative may be exercises that strengthen the throat. While they aren't as established or as well studied as breathing machines, some research suggests they may reduce the severity of sleep apnea by building up muscles around the airway, making them less likely to collapse at night.

In [a study published last year](#) in The American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine, scientists recruited a group of people with obstructive sleep apnea and split them into two groups. One was trained to do breathing exercises daily, while the other did 30 minutes of throat exercises, including swallowing and chewing motions, placing the tip of the tongue against the front of the palate and sliding it back, and pronouncing certain vowels quickly and continuously.

After three months, subjects who did the throat exercises snored less, slept better and reduced the severity of their condition by 39 percent. They also showed reductions in neck circumference, a known risk factor for [apnea](#). The control group showed almost no improvement.

Other randomized studies have found similar effects. [One even showed](#) that playing instruments that strengthen the airways, like the didgeridoo, can ease sleep apnea.

#### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

For people with sleep apnea, throat exercises may be a cheap and useful therapy.

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