Screening for Obstructive Sleep Apnea in Adults

The US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) has published a recommendation on screening for obstructive sleep apnea in adults.

What Is Obstructive Sleep Apnea?
Obstructive sleep apnea is a condition in which breathing during sleep is abnormal. People with obstructive sleep apnea often stop breathing for short periods or have decreased airflow with breathing during sleep because of a blockage in the airway. This blockage can be related to obesity, a small lower face, a large tongue, or enlarged tonsils. The major symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea are loud snoring and daytime sleepiness or fatigue. Sometimes people who have these symptoms do not recognize them as being a problem. Treatment with a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine or wearing a mouthpiece while sleeping can reduce some symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea such as daytime sleepiness. Weight loss can also help in people who are obese.

How Strong Is the Recommendation to Screen for Obstructive Sleep Apnea?
Evidence is lacking for both potential benefits and potential harms of obstructive sleep apnea screening in adults in the primary care setting, and there is not enough evidence to show that the benefits of screening, early detection, and treatment of obstructive sleep apnea outweigh the harms. Therefore, the USPSTF is unable to make a recommendation for or against screening.

Bottom Line: Current Recommendation for Screening for Obstructive Sleep Apnea
The USPSTF concludes that the current evidence is insufficient to assess the balance of benefits and harms of screening for obstructive sleep apnea in adults (an “I” recommendation).

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