

# "I finally have my life back!"

Doctors didn't know why Mary Adkins, 39, was so tired. Then her dentist discovered the shocking cause—and a simple solution

"You can open your eyes now!" Mary's boyfriend, Steve, said with a grin. "I obliged—and found myself across the table from this wonderful man and the candlelit Valentine's Day dinner he had lovingly prepared," Mary recalls. "I managed a smile, but I was so tired that I could barely sit up. *Am I losing it?* I wondered glumly. *I have the man of my dreams and I'm counting down the minutes until I can hit the couch—alone!*

## Fatigued and foggy

"My energy took a nosedive three years ago. At first I told myself: *Go to bed a little earlier tonight, get enough sleep and you'll feel better tomorrow.* But even after logging a solid eight hours, I still went through the day bleary-eyed.

"After five minutes of any activity—whether it was a trip to the grocery store or chatting on the phone with a friend—I was ready to doze off. Most unsettling was the impact my fatigue had on my relationship with Steve. I tried to ensure that we had quality time together, but no sooner would we settle down to catch up on our day than I'd feel a tap on my shoulder and a bewildered, 'Honey? Honey? You asleep?'

"I loved my job as a dental assistant, but soon I was routinely arriving late for work and lethargically trudging from one examining room to another. It was totally out of character for me.

"*I don't know what's happening to me!* I wanted to shout to let everyone know I was doing everything I could—trying to eat well, exercise and get adequate rest—to avoid being an

incompetent, exhausted mess. Often it was only sheer willpower that got me through my day.

"Fatigue and brain fog were my most notable problems, but I was also plagued by morning headaches, a hoarse throat and low blood pressure. In the beginning I chalked up my symptoms to stress or aging, but when I started making mistakes at work and going to bed before the neighbors' kids returned from soccer practice, I knew it had to be something more. And in truth, I was harder on myself than was my boss of the past decade, James Metz, D.D.S., who, bless him, was more concerned than annoyed.

"I saw several doctors, who ran blood panels, stress tests and EKGs, all of which came back normal. I was prescribed a cocktail of remedies that ranged from proton-pump inhibitors for acid reflux to antidepressants. I tried each solution but only briefly, as I didn't care for the side effects.

## An answer at last

"Just when I thought I was out of options, Dr. Metz approached me and said he had a hunch. He'd been researching my symptoms and thought I might have *upper airway resistance syndrome*—a sleep disorder characterized by dozens of brief

episodes of gasping for air during the night. Although grateful for his feedback, I objected, 'Dr. Metz, sleeping is the *one* thing I can still do just fine!'

"He suggested I undergo a sleep study, and I agreed—more to get him off my back than anything else. To my astonishment, his hunch was correct. No wonder I'd been so exhausted: I'd been waking up for split seconds 10 times an hour all night long without being aware of it!

"Dr. Metz recommended that I get a *mandibular advancement device*, a custom-made mouthpiece that pulls the jaw forward and opens the airway during sleep.

"He fitted me for the device, which insurance covered, and within a week of using it, I was getting a solid night's sleep. My energy began to soar, and every aspect of my life did a 180. Incredibly, I felt like *me* again! I owe Dr. Metz—who was inspired to become a sleep-medicine dentist because of my experience—a debt of gratitude for not only being my boss but being my friend and solving my health mystery.

"Today I feel fantastic and am again bringing my A-game to work. And this Valentine's Day, it'll be *my* turn to surprise Steve with a romantic dinner—and sleep will be the last thing on my mind!" —as told to Hallie Potocki

## Alert! Restless sleep can slow your thyroid

**Tossing and turning may be putting your thyroid to sleep, say Canadian researchers.** They studied people with hypothyroidism and found that 62 percent also had obstructive sleep apnea, a condition marked by breathing disruptions that last for 10 seconds or longer, causing multiple awakenings. The likely reason for the link? Sleep loss increases levels of cortisol—a stress hormone that can suppress thyroid function and worsen, or even trigger, hypothyroidism.

The good news: Cortisol levels have been shown to return to normal soon after sleep is restored. If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your doctor about undergoing a sleep test and having your thyroid checked—especially if you have symptoms of low thyroid, like excessive hair loss or unexplained weight gain.

Mary Adkins, Blacklick, OH

## One-minute QUIZ

### COULD THIS SLEEP STEALER BE CAUSING YOUR FATIGUE?

If you suffer from fatigue and two or more of the symptoms below, you may have *upper airway resistance syndrome*.

- ✓ Low blood pressure
- ✓ Cold hands or feet
- ✓ Dizziness
- ✓ Anxiety or blue moods
- ✓ Inability to handle stress
- ✓ GI problems
- ✓ Hypothyroidism

More than 50% of women suffer from this hidden syndrome

! A little-known energy-draining condition called *upper airway resistance syndrome (UARS)*, is marked by fatigue, fog and anxiety.

More than half of women are affected, says Steven Y. Park, M.D., author of *Sleep, Interrupted*. But since many doctors aren't aware of the syndrome, in which sufferers briefly stop breathing multiple times while they sleep, millions go undiagnosed.

! Having a small jaw increases the risk since there's less space behind the tongue and septum, near the oral and nasal cavities. During sleep, the muscles around these cavities relax and the airways narrow, raising the risk that the tongue and septum will obstruct breathing, explains Michael Breus, Ph.D., a sleep-disorder specialist. This can happen dozens of times each night, preventing sufferers from achieving restful REM sleep.

✓ To diagnose UARS, a sleep specialist can perform a physical exam and take a health history. He may also order a sleep study to support his diagnosis: If you stop breathing for up to nine seconds several times at night, you likely have UARS.

😊 Nasal strips and decongestants can relieve symptoms, says Breus. He recommends Breathe Right Nasal Strips (\$14 for 30, at Soap.com), which open the nasal passages, and saline washes, which flush obstructions and ease inflammation. When used together, sleep may improve the first night.

😊 Mouthpieces help force the jaw forward, increasing the space behind the tongue. Dr. Park suggests asking your dentist about a custom-fitted one.

😊 Also smart: sleeping on your side or stomach to reduce the risk of the tongue blocking the airway.