

PERSONAL FINANCE

Cranky Consumer / By Sarah Tilton

Trying to Muzzle a Snoring Spouse

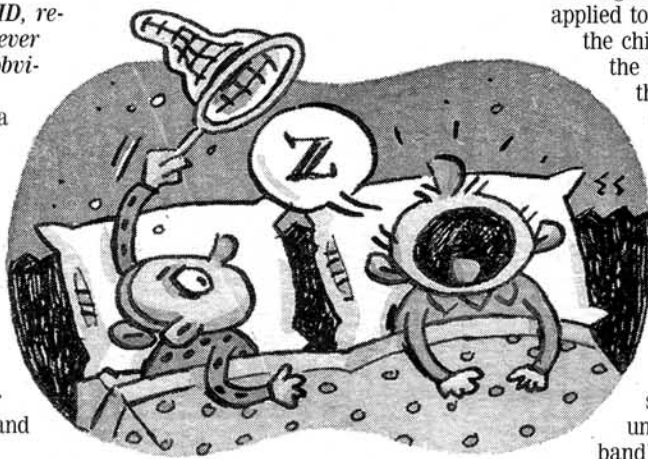
MARRIAGE, IT IS OFTEN SAID, requires lots of patience. Whoever first made that observation was obviously married to a snorer.

Having a spouse who snores is a bit like sharing your bedroom with a mosquito: You never know when the noise will stop, when it will start again, and how loud it will get. According to the latest data from the National Sleep Foundation, some 42% of men and 31% of women snore at least a few nights a week. And snoring tends to worsen as people age and put on weight, which doesn't bode well for an America that is getting grayer and fatter.

Tired of having to wake our husband every night and order him to roll over, we went in search of a quick and easy remedy. Google "snoring and cures" and you're flooded with 16,100 results, but we settled on five over-the-counter treatments, ranging from chin straps to nose strips to throat sprays. (Our husband drew the line at a wristband that zaps the wearer with an electrical charge when it detects a snore.)

The checkout clerk at Walgreens looked sympathetic as she rang up our purchases. She confessed that her husband of 28 years is a snorer, and pointed to the dark circles under her eyes.

The Sleep Wizard, an adjustable strap that goes under the chin, over the ears and around the head, aims to keep the snorer's mouth closed, thus encouraging him to breathe through his nose. It comes in a one-size fits all, though our husband apparently didn't fall into the "all" category: The device, which we



Elwood Smith

bought online, fell off once during the night. The Sleep Wizard did help keep the noise down, though periodically we could hear his attempts to snore his way free of the device.

Breathe Right throat spray, a spokeswoman explained, lubricates loose or vibrating throat tissue, which is another cause of snoring. We spritzed our husband two or three times before bedtime (the spray tastes like minty mouthwash), but to no avail.

Jed Black, director of the Stanford Sleep Disorders Clinic in Palo Alto, Calif., says over-the-counter products can do only so much. Snoring comes in many varieties, he explains. And, if you have sleep apnea, a treatable but potentially life-threatening disorder, no store-bought product will help, he adds. He recommends that all regular snorers see a doctor and sign up for an overnight evaluation. When our husband heard

that there was a three-month wait list for an evaluation at the Stanford clinic (cost: \$4,057), he said he'd sleep on it.

But some of the products we tested were definitely more effective than others. Chin-Up Strips, which resemble extra-large and extra-sticky Band-Aids, are applied to the sides of the mouth and the chin. As with the Sleep Wizard, the idea is to discourage breathing through the mouth. (The strips don't actually cover the mouth, but the upper and lower lips should feel "puckered," according to the directions.)

Sales of the strips are up 50% in the past two years, including exports to Japan and England, says Dale Miller, a sometime snorer who invented the product. The strips clearly reduced the volume and frequency of our husband's snoring. A bonus: He said he didn't wake up with the usual dry mouth.

We also tried Breathe Right nasal strips, small adhesives that go over the bridge of the nose. The strips, versions of which are now popular among pro athletes, claim to open the nasal passages, thus reducing snoring caused by nasal congestion. Our husband said he could actually feel the spring-loaded strips pulling open his nasal passages—and we could hear the improvement.

Our quest for peace and quiet finally led us to a Web site advertising "World's Finest Ear Plugs—Block out Snoring Instantly." These are not the usual foam plugs. They look like small blue pieces of modeling clay, which you knead between your fingers and then push into your ears. The ear plugs managed to drown out much of the world—but couldn't totally block out our snorer.

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PRODUCT/PRICE	HOW IT WORKS	EASE OF USE	SNORER'S COMMENT	RESULTS
Breathe Right nasal strips /\$6.49 plus tax for a box of 12 strips	Adhesive tape that goes over the bridge of the nose	Hard to screw up	Said he could actually feel the strips open up his nasal passages	Lightened up the snoring, but didn't eliminate it
Breathe Right throat spray /\$14.59 plus tax for a bottle	Spray to the back of the throat at bedtime	A couple of spritzes is all that is called for	Was impressed with its simplicity	We wound up reverting to our old strategy: nudging the snorer and rolling him on his side
Chin-Up Strips /\$13.30 plus shipping for a 30-day supply (chin-up.com)	Extra large, extra sticky "u" shaped Band-Aids that support the lower jaw and keep the mouth closed	If it's on correctly, wearer should have trouble saying, "three gray geese grazing."	Was worried that it might have a waxing effect on his facial hair—but it didn't	Not pretty to look at, but muffled the snoring
Sleep Wizard /\$69.97 plus shipping (sleepwizard.com)	Goes under the chin, over the ears and around the head to support the lower jaw	Product says one size fits all, but ours fell off once during the night	Said it takes some getting used to	Didn't wow us, but company says results improve over time as muscles are retrained