SYMPTOM

Excessive yawning

Excessive yawning means yawning repeatedly or more often than usual.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Repeated urges to open your mouth and breathe deeply

WHERE IT IS FELT
Mouth, jaw, throat, and chest

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Too little sleep, daytime sleepiness, medication effects

WHEN IT IS URGENT
New yawning with severe headache, weakness, fainting, or chest pain

USUALLY LASTS
Minutes when tired; longer if sleep or medication problems continue

SEE A DOCTOR IF
It persists, disrupts daily life, or causes daytime sleepiness

Overview

Yawning is an automatic action that opens your mouth, stretches your jaw muscles, and brings in a deep breath. It often happens when you are tired, waking up, bored, or shifting between levels of alertness.

There is no set number of yawns that counts as excessive. It means yawning much more often than usual for you, especially if it is difficult to control or affects conversation, work, driving, or other activities.

Most episodes are related to tiredness or disrupted sleep. Sometimes frequent yawning is linked to a medicine, sleep disorder, migraine, or another medical problem. Rarely, a sudden change can accompany an urgent heart or nervous system condition.

Yawning may help regulate alertness, but it is not a reliable measure of blood oxygen levels.

What it may feel or look like

An episode usually begins with an urge to open your mouth. You may take a long breath, stretch your jaw, briefly close your eyes, or notice watering eyes and pressure in your ears.

With excessive yawning, the urge may return every few minutes and feel uncomfortable to suppress. Other symptoms can include sleepiness, poor concentration, headache, nausea, dizziness, or feeling faint. These can help identify the cause.

Repeated sighing or deep breaths can be mistaken for yawning. If your main problem is feeling unable to get enough air, chest tightness, or difficult breathing, treat it as a breathing symptom rather than yawning alone.

Common causes

Common causes include too little sleep, irregular sleep schedules, jet lag, shift work, and fatigue. Yawning may be more noticeable during quiet or repetitive activities as alertness falls.

Poor-quality sleep can have the same effect even if you spend enough time in bed. Obstructive sleep apnea causes repeated pauses or reductions in breathing during sleep. Clues include loud snoring, gasping, morning headaches, and waking without feeling rested.

Medicines can contribute. Yawning has been reported with some antidepressants like sertraline or fluoxetine , while medicines that cause drowsiness, including some antihistamines and pain medicines, may indirectly increase it. Withdrawal from certain medicines or drugs can have a similar effect. Do not stop a prescribed medicine suddenly without medical advice.

Less common causes include narcolepsy, which disrupts control of sleep and wakefulness. It can cause overwhelming daytime sleepiness, sudden sleep episodes, or temporary muscle weakness triggered by strong emotions.

Yawning can occur before or during migraine. Other early symptoms may include tiredness, mood changes, food cravings, neck stiffness, or difficulty concentrating.

Repeated yawning may also occur during a vasovagal episode, which can slow the heart rate and lower blood pressure, sometimes causing fainting. Nausea, sweating, warmth, blurred vision, or light-headedness may come first.

Urgent causes are uncommon. Sudden unusual yawning can occasionally occur with a stroke, seizure, or another brain problem. Yawning alone does not indicate these conditions; accompanying symptoms determine the urgency.

When to seek medical care

Call emergency services if sudden excessive yawning occurs with:

These symptoms need emergency assessment whether or not yawning is present. Do not

drive yourself if you may be having a stroke, heart emergency, or seizure.

Seek same-day medical advice if frequent yawning starts suddenly with persistent dizziness, repeated near-fainting, a new headache, or a recent medicine change. Get prompt help if sleepiness makes driving, operating equipment, or staying awake unsafe.

Book a routine appointment if yawning continues for several days or weeks, keeps returning, or disrupts daily life. Arrange a review if you have loud snoring, witnessed pauses in breathing during sleep, unrefreshing sleep, or strong daytime sleepiness.

- Weakness or numbness on one side
- A drooping face or difficulty speaking
- A sudden, severe headache
- New confusion, loss of balance, or vision loss
- Chest pain, severe breathing difficulty, or collapse
- A seizure or inability to wake normally

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the yawning began, how often it happens, and whether you feel sleepy. Describe your sleep schedule, snoring, headaches, faint feelings, recent illness, and any new or changed medicines.

They may check your blood pressure, heart rate, breathing, alertness, strength, coordination, and reflexes. Your symptoms will determine whether tests are needed.

If a sleep disorder is suspected, you may be asked to keep a sleep diary or have a sleep study that records breathing, oxygen levels, heart rate, and sleep stages. Blood tests may check for anemia, thyroid disease, or other causes of fatigue. New neurological symptoms may require urgent brain imaging.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. Improving sleep may be enough for sleep loss or an irregular schedule. A sleep disorder, migraine, fainting tendency, or other condition may need specific treatment.

You can try to:

Do not change or stop prescribed medicines on your own. A clinician or pharmacist can check

whether yawning or drowsiness is a known effect and whether treatment needs adjustment.

Caffeine may briefly improve alertness, but it does not replace sleep or treat an underlying sleep disorder. Taking it late in the day may disrupt nighttime sleep.

- Keep regular sleeping and waking times
- Allow enough time for sleep
- Take movement and daylight breaks during quiet tasks
- Record yawning, sleep, headaches, and medicine changes
- Avoid driving whenever you feel unusually sleepy

What to expect

Yawning related to a short night, jet lag, or temporary fatigue often settles when normal sleep returns. If a medicine or ongoing sleep problem is involved, it may continue until the cause is addressed.

A brief symptom diary can reveal patterns. Note the time of day, sleep duration, medicines, headaches, dizziness, and what you were doing when yawning began.

The outlook depends on the cause. Persistent symptoms deserve routine assessment, while sudden yawning with neurological, heart, or fainting symptoms needs urgent care.

Common questions

Does excessive yawning mean I am not getting enough oxygen?

Usually not. Yawning is not a dependable sign of low oxygen. However, difficult breathing, blue or grey lips, chest pain, or confusion needs urgent medical attention.

Why do I yawn when someone else yawns?

Seeing, hearing, reading, or thinking about yawning can trigger contagious yawning, which occurs in healthy people.

Can stress cause frequent yawning?

Stress can disturb sleep and affect breathing patterns, increasing yawning or repeated sighing. New or persistent yawning should not automatically be attributed to stress.

Should I worry if I yawn while driving?

Yawning while driving can warn that your alertness is falling. Stop somewhere safe and do not

continue until adequately rested. Repeated driving sleepiness should be medically assessed.

Sources

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