



breathe again...

Consultant paediatric ear, nose and throat (ENT) surgeon, **Dr Dawn Teo**, 39, co-owns *The Children's Eye & ENT Centre* at Mount Elizabeth Novena Hospital.

Look twice if your peewee is struggling with issues such as daytime sleepiness, hyperactivity, poor school performance or behavioural problems. These may be signs that he is suffering from a condition called sleep apnoea.

Explaining that this form of sleep disorder occurs when a child is unable to breathe well, Dawn notes that he'll snore or completely stop breathing for a



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second while asleep, so that insufficient oxygen reaches the brain.

“Like adequate nutrition, adequate sleep is necessary for a child to grow and develop,” asserts the mum of two boys, Evan, 2, and Sean, 4. “In severe cases of sleep apnoea, the child may face developmental problems, not only physically, but also in terms of behaviour and learning.”

Married to fellow ENT surgeon Dr Ng Yuk Hui, 41, Dawn sees about 600 young patients a year. Citing enlarged tonsils as the most common cause of sleep apnoea, she adds, “But sometimes, an enlarged tongue, floppy airway or facial skeletal malformations may also be responsible.”

Dawn also notes that there's a steady rise in overweight kids with sleep apnoea, “They are at risk as their airways get narrower as they grow wider, which

obstructs their breathing.”

And while most of her patients are between ages 3 and 5 — which is when their soft tissue growth is often faster than their bone development — she has also treated infants with this condition. “Besides the breathing problem during sleep, other symptoms in babies include poor feeding and growth, and restless sleep.”

The good news is that in most cases, she can resolve this condition easily — it does not require any stitches and leaves no scars — in a 45-minute surgical procedure that she carries out through the nose and mouth.

“And since they can eat as much ice cream as they want to help with recovery, I've heard the kids recommend it to their peers, just for that reason alone!” she quips.

top tips!

HEALTH CONDITIONS THAT MAY AFFECT BUBBA'S SLEEP...

- **Nasal allergies** Result in constant sneezing and congestion of the nose.
- **Post-nasal drip** When excessive mucus accumulates in the back of the nose.
- **Gastric reflux** When stomach contents, including acid, moves upward into the oesophagus and sometimes into or out of the mouth, which gives rise to discomfort and a “burning” sensation.