

Tips for Your Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) Therapy

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Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy uses a machine to blow air into your throat to keep your airway open while you sleep. The air pressure is adjusted to your need.

CPAP therapy is a common and effective treatment for sleep apnea. It can help you to breathe better and sleep better. Most patients feel more comfortable with their CPAP machine over time.

The following tips can help you become more comfortable with your CPAP therapy.

Make Sure Your Mask Fits Well

The first step in getting comfortable with your CPAP therapy is to choose a mask that fits well. Some people need a full face mask to help with nasal congestion. Others may need a small nasal pillow mask that allows them to wear their glasses. Your equipment provider will help you find a mask to fit your needs.

Adjusting your mask is just as important as finding one that fits well. Try adjusting the mask while you are lying down with your full CPAP pressure blowing.

Your mask should be loose enough to allow air to fill the cushion. Make sure the mask does not sit too high on the bridge of your nose. This will prevent air from blowing into your eyes. A clean-shaven face will also help your mask to fit well.

Adjust Your Air Pressure

If you are having difficulty breathing at the air pressure your health care provider prescribed, you may need to choose the “ramp” setting on your CPAP machine.

The “ramp” setting allows the air to blow at a lower pressure when you first go to bed or after waking up during the night. As you fall asleep, the air pressure will gradually increase to your prescribed pressure. Your equipment provider can make adjustments for this setting as needed.

Prevent Dry Mouth or Nose

A heated humidifier can help to add moisture to the air and reduce dryness. You can adjust your humidifier to a higher (more moisture) setting if you continue to wake up with a dry mouth or nose. A nasal saline spray at bedtime may also be helpful.

If you have a nasal mask and wake up with a dry mouth, you may be opening your mouth while you sleep. Ask your equipment provider about changing to a full-face mask or adding a chin strap to support your mouth with your current mask.

Prevent Moisture in Your Tubing

Moisture in your tubing (also called “rainout”) occurs when warm, moist air from your machine meets the cooler air in the room. This causes water droplets to form in your tubing.

To prevent this from happening, you can try the following.

- Turn down the humidity setting on your CPAP or turn up the thermostat in your bedroom.
- Purchase tubing covers at your medical equipment store. You can also make your own tubing covers out of fabric (fleece, flannel).
- Your health care provider may prescribe a heated wire circuit if needed.

Keep Your Mask on Overnight

It is common to accidentally remove your mask during the night when you first start using it. Your mask should fit well without air leaks. Make any adjustments as needed.

If you continue to wake up without your mask on, consider setting an alarm to check it during the night. When you find you are keeping your mask on for longer, set your alarm for a later time.

Get Used to Wearing Your CPAP

It may be helpful to take it one step at a time to get used to wearing your CPAP machine. Make sure you are comfortable with one step before moving on to the next.

- Start by holding the mask only up to your face (no straps) while you're awake.

- Add the straps and wear the mask in place.
- Attach the mask to the tubing and CPAP machine. Hold the mask in place with the machine set to blow on low pressure (or the "ramp" setting).
- Add the straps and wear the mask in place (with air blowing) while doing an activity such as watching TV or reading.
- Try taking a short nap while wearing your CPAP mask.

Continue doing these steps until you are comfortable enough to wear your CPAP when you go to bed.

Prevent Skin Irritation

Keeping your skin and CPAP clean is important for the health of your skin.

Clean your mask with mild soap (without added moisturizers or perfumes) every day. A clean mask and clean face will help your mask fit well without air leaks.

If your mask fits well and your skin is still irritated, try using a different cleanser such as baby shampoo.

Whom To Call With Questions

Call Allina Health Home Oxygen & Medical Equipment at 651-628-4800 or 1-800-737-4473 if you have questions about your CPAP machine. For questions about CPAP therapy, please call your health care provider.