

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) Therapy for Sleep Apnea

Sleep Apnea

Sleep apnea is a common sleep disorder that stops your breathing while you sleep. Your windpipe narrows (collapses) during breathing, blocking air flow. Your lungs can't take in oxygen or breathe out carbon dioxide.

Your brain responds to the falling oxygen levels by waking you enough to tighten the upper airway muscles and open your windpipe. You may snort or gasp and continue snoring. This can happen more than 100 times per hour each night.

As a result of this restless sleep (of which you may not even be aware) your physical and mental health can be affected, leading to daytime sleepiness.

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) Therapy

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy is the most common way to reduce or eliminate sleep apnea.

For this treatment, you wear a mask over your nose while you sleep. The machine blows air into your throat through a tube connected to the mask. This increased air pressure keeps your airway open.

The CPAP machine sits by your bed. It filters air from your room and delivers the air to you at an increased pressure. The air pressure can be adjusted so you get the right amount you need.

How the Health Care Provider Will Determine Your Need for CPAP Therapy

To help your health care provider tell if you may benefit from CPAP therapy, they may:

- ask for your medical history
- ask questions about how you sleep and feel during the day
- check your mouth, nose and throat for obstruction
- ask you to have a sleep study (polysomnography). While you sleep, the sleep center staff monitors your stages of sleep, brain activity, muscle activity, eye movement, breathing, air flow, heart rate and blood oxygen levels.

If your health care provider wants you to use a CPAP machine, they will write a prescription for it. (Check with your insurance provider for coverage.)

The machine is available in different sizes and may have different features. The machine may:

- have a humidity control to keep the air moist as you breathe
- be able to automatically adjust the amount of air pressure needed to keep your airway open
- be able to start with a low air pressure and slowly increase the air pressure as you fall asleep.

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A technologist may come to your home with the CPAP machine. They would set it up and make adjustments based on your health care provider's orders. If not, you will learn how to set it up during a clinic or hospital visit.

CPAP Benefits

Regular use of the CPAP machine will keep your breathing from stopping and may decrease daytime sleepiness, leaving you feeling more refreshed.

Sleep apnea will return if you stop using the CPAP machine or if it's not used correctly.

CPAP Side Effects

Treatment may cause side effects, including:

- dry, stuffy or runny nose
- irritation of skin on your face
- stomach bloating
- sore eyes
- headache
- itching
- nosebleeds.

If you have side effects, or think you're getting a cold, please talk with your health care provider. To reduce your side effects, you may be able to:

- use a nasal spray
- adjust the CPAP machine settings
- adjust the size or fit of the mask
- add moisture to the air
- try a different type of machine.

Travel With the Machine

You will be able to travel with your CPAP machine. If you did not receive a travel case with your machine, call the supplier to get one.

The machine is portable, quiet and can be plugged into electrical outlets or run on batteries. (See the manufacturer's instructions.)

Although airport X-ray machines will not harm the machine, tell airport personnel that you have a machine.

Follow-up Appointment

Follow up with your health care provider after the first month of CPAP therapy. They will want to check your machine, check your sleep apnea symptoms and check any other symptoms you may have had (such as high blood pressure).

When to Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if:

- you are ill and do not think you can comfortably use the mask
- the sleep apnea symptoms do not improve, or if you have new symptoms
- you cannot tolerate the side effects.

Care of the Equipment

Because you are breathing the air from your CPAP machine right into your lungs, it is very important that you follow the cleaning instructions. Remember, bacteria grow in warm, moist and dark places. You need to keep the equipment clean to avoid getting health problems and to keep the machine working properly.

When to Call the Equipment Company

Call the equipment company if:

- the machine is not working right
- your mask leaks air, irritates your face or does not fit right.

**Some of this information
was adapted from the National
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