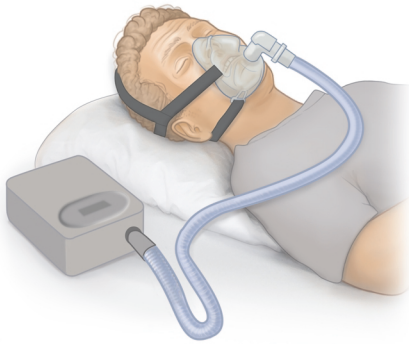


Sleep Apnea: CPAP Breathing Machines



What is CPAP?

If you have obstructive sleep apnea, your airway gets blocked while you sleep, and you stop breathing for short periods.

Your doctor may suggest that you use a breathing machine while you sleep. The most common type is a CPAP, or continuous positive airway pressure machine. CPAP can help you sleep better so you feel much better.

CPAP is a small machine that you use at home every night while you sleep. It increases air pressure in your throat to keep your airway open. This helps you breathe better during sleep.

The CPAP machine has either a mask that covers your nose and mouth, a mask that covers your nose only, or prongs that fit into your nose. Most people use the type of mask that fits over just the nose. This type is called nasal continuous positive airway pressure, or NCPAP.

Why it is done

CPAP is usually the best treatment for obstructive sleep apnea. It is the first treatment choice and the most widely used.

Your doctor may suggest CPAP if you have:

- Moderate to severe sleep apnea.
- Sleep apnea and heart failure or coronary artery disease (CAD).
- Mixed sleep apnea. Mixed sleep apnea is obstructive sleep apnea combined with a more rare type called central sleep apnea.

How well it works

- CPAP can help you have more normal sleep, so you feel less sleepy and more alert during the daytime.
- CPAP may help keep heart failure or other heart problems from getting worse.
- NCPAP may help lower your blood pressure.
- If you use CPAP, your bed partner may also sleep better because you are not snoring or restless.

What to expect

It may take time to get used to CPAP. You may want to take the mask off, or you may find it hard to sleep while you use it. The first week or two are usually the hardest. Try to stick with it.

If you have problems, talk to your doctor. You may be able to try another type of mask or make other changes. If your doctor has told you to use CPAP, it is very important to keep using it.

Side effects

CPAP is safe and works well when used on a regular basis. Some people who use CPAP have:

- A dry or stuffy nose and sore throat.
- Irritated skin on the face.
- Sore eyes.
- Bloating.
- Headaches.

If you have any of these problems, work with your doctor to fix them.

- Be sure the mask or nasal prongs fit well.
- Your doctor may be able to adjust the pressure of your CPAP.
- If your nose is dry, try a humidifier.
- If your nose is runny or stuffy, try decongestant medicine or a steroid nasal spray. If you use a nasal spray, be sure to read the label carefully. Do not use it longer than directed.

If these measures do not help, you might try a different type of machine. Some machines have air pressure that adjusts on its own. Others have air pressures that are different when you breathe in than when you breathe out. This may reduce discomfort caused by too much pressure in your nose.

What to think about

- You will need to see your doctor or sleep specialist for regular follow-up. You may need to have more sleep studies. These can help your doctor set your CPAP machine to the right pressure and check to see whether it is helping you.
- The machines are expensive. Check to see if your insurance covers the cost.