

Patient Information

Getting to Grips with CPAP





■ The CPAP mask

The standard mask fits over the nose leaving the mouth free. The fit of a mask is a very important part of the success of CPAP therapy, so there are lots of options for you to try if you find a standard nasal mask does not meet your needs. Most suppliers of sleep therapy equipment now have a range of masks available including nasal masks, full face interfaces, nasal pillows and mouth only masks.

Mask designs vary between manufacturers but most share a number of common features. These common features include a flexible cushion that rests against the face which is attached to the hard plastic mask body. The head straps (headgear) are attached to the mask body and they keep the mask in place during sleep. There are many masks on the market that have quick release straps, for easy removal.



The mask will also have an inlet tube, which attaches to the CPAP tubing, bringing the air from the machine to the mask. Outlet port(s) allow the exhaled air to escape. Some designs have a swivel feature built in to this port to allow directional control of exhaled air (enabling the CPAP user to direct the exhaled air away from their bed partner).

Your physician will advise you on the best mask for your treatment, but it is worth remembering that there are many types of masks available to ensure an effective CPAP therapy.





■ The CPAP machine

The CPAP machine is a flow generator which consists of a pump that sucks air in from the room through a dust filter and blows it out under a pre-set pressure. This pressure varies according to the individual needs. Your consultant will prescribe your set pressure which is determined during a sleep study.

Most CPAP machines have a delay timer or an inbuilt "ramping system". This allows you to become accustomed to a low pressure of air whilst going to sleep. The machine will then gradually build up to the pre-set pressure when you are sleeping.

Although your CPAP machine is normally used in the home it may also be taken with you when you travel. Most CPAP's have a universal power supply that automatically switches between 110 - 240 Volt and can also be run in vehicles using a special adaptor. The use of CPAP's are approved by some airlines but you should make detailed arrangements with the airline for use on a particular flight. For further details of available accessories and spare parts please consult your equipment supplier.



■ Fitting of the Mask

The fit of the CPAP mask is crucial to ensure a successful CPAP therapy. Once it has been decided that a person is suitable for CPAP therapy a device and mask will be issued. The specialist sleep physician will instruct new users on the correct fitting of the mask to achieve a good seal around the nose and or mouth. Additionally, most suppliers and manufacturers of CPAP masks provide helpful hints with fitting. It is important that the mask is not too loose as leaks will occur, and air will escape causing hissing noises and the therapy will be less effective. It is equally important that the mask is not too tight, as this can lead to sores across the bridge of the nose.

Once the CPAP machine is turned on, the straps can be adjusted until a comfortable fit is achieved without any air leaks from the mask. It may be necessary to re-adjust the straps once you are lying down in your normal sleeping position.



What to expect when using CPAP at home

Position your CPAP device and tubing to suit your preferred sleeping position. Some people prefer to bring the tubing over the top of the headboard whilst others run it over their shoulder. Try both ways and select whichever is more comfortable for you.

When using your CPAP for the first time you will notice an unusual sense of pressure when breathing. It is normal to feel some resistance to breathing out as you are having to breathe out against the incoming air flow. It is advisable to keep your mouth closed when wearing a nasal mask/pillows. If you open your mouth, air will leak out. This may feel uncomfortable, as though you cannot get your breath.

If you wake in the night and feel uncomfortable with the pressure of the machine, switch it off and remove the face mask for a few minutes. When you replace the mask make sure it is comfortable before restarting the machine and breathe slowly with your mouth closed.



■ Humidification

Some people experience nasal congestion when using CPAP. Your consultant may prescribe nasal sprays if this persists. Some people experience dryness of the nose, mouth or throat when on CPAP, particularly in the winter months. If air through the mask is cold and disrupts your sleep, there are some solutions that will help combat these problems.

The most common solution for CPAP users is a heated humidifier. This is a device that fits to the CPAP to heat and moisten the air flow. The heated, moistened air eases the symptoms of dryness of the throat and nose for better patient comfort. For further advice ask your sleep specialist.

Patient information series leaflets:

- Obstructive Sleep Apnoea
- All about C.P.A.P.
- Getting to grips with your C.P.A.P. system
- Common problems and solutions for C.P.A.P. users



FlexSet CPAP Mask



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