



CPAP & BIPAP devices: Tips for avoiding 10 common problems

CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) therapy is a common treatment for sleep apnea. CPAP includes a small machine that supplies a constant and steady air pressure, a hose, and a mask or nose piece. Common problems with CPAP include a leaky mask, trouble falling asleep, and a dry mouth or nose. If you are experiencing these or other issues, you're not alone — two out of every three people using CPAP devices will experience such problems.

The good news is that if one CPAP mask or device doesn't work for you, you have other options. And most CPAP masks are adjustable, to help make them more comfortable for you. Here are 10 common CPAP problems and what you can do about them.

The wrong size or style CPAP mask

Work closely with your doctor and CPAP supplier to make sure you have a CPAP mask that suits your needs and fits you. Everyone has different needs and face shapes, so the right style and size mask for someone else may not work for you.

- **Many mask styles available.** A range of CPAP masks are available. For example, some feature full face masks that cover your mouth and nose, with straps that stretch across your forehead and cheeks. These may make some people feel claustrophobic, but they work well at providing a stable fit if you move around a lot in your sleep. Other masks feature nasal pillows that fit under your nose and straps that cover less of your face. These can feel less cumbersome. And they may work well if you wear glasses or read with the mask on, because some nasal pillow masks obstruct vision less than do full face masks. However, they may not work if you move around a lot in your sleep or sleep on your side.
- **Size important.** Most masks come in different sizes. Just because you're a certain size in one mask doesn't mean you'll be the same size in another. CPAP masks are usually adjustable. Ask your doctor or CPAP supplier to show you how to adjust your mask to get the best fit. Manufacturer product instructions also can help show you how to do this.

Trouble getting used to wearing the CPAP device

It may help to start by practicing wearing just the CPAP mask for short periods of time while you're awake, for example while watching TV. Then try wearing the mask and hose with the air pressure on, still during the daytime while you're awake. Once you become accustomed to how that feels, shift to using the CPAP device every time you sleep — at night and during naps. Inconsistently wearing the CPAP device may delay getting used to it. Stick with it for several weeks or more to see if the mask and pressure settings you have will work for you.

Difficulty tolerating forced air

You may be able to overcome this by using a "ramp" feature on the machine. This feature allows you to start with low air pressure, followed by an automatic, gradual increase in the pressure to your prescribed setting as you fall asleep. For example, the pressure can be increased over 10, 15 or 20 minutes. The rate of this ramp feature can be adjusted by your doctor.

If this doesn't help, talk with your doctor about changing to a different type of device that automatically adjusts the pressure while you're sleeping. For example, units that supply bi-level positive airway pressure (BiPAP) are available. These provide more pressure when you inhale and less when you exhale.

Dry, stuffy nose

A CPAP device that features a heated humidifier, which attaches to the air pressure machine, can help. The level of humidification is adjustable. Using a nasal saline spray at bedtime also can help. Your doctor may prescribe a nasal steroid spray if your dryness doesn't respond to heated humidity. It's also important that your mask fit well. A leaky mask can dry out your nose.

Feeling claustrophobic

While you're awake, practice by first just holding the mask up to your face without any of the other parts. Once you're comfortable with that, try wearing the mask with the straps. Next, try holding on the mask and hose, without the straps, with the hose attached to the CPAP machine at a low pressure setting (turn the ramp feature on). And, finally, wear the mask with the straps and with the air pressure machine turned on while awake. After you're comfortable with that, try sleeping with it on.

Relaxation exercises, such as progressive muscle relaxation, also may help reduce your anxiety. If you're still feeling claustrophobic, talk to your doctor or CPAP supplier. It may help to get a different size mask or try a different style, such as one that uses nasal pillows.

Leaky mask, skin irritation or pressure sores

A leaky or ill-fitting mask means you're not getting the full air pressure you need, and you may be irritating your skin. It can also release air into your eyes, causing them to become dry or teary. Try adjusting pads and straps to get a better fit. If the device fits over your nose, make sure it doesn't sit too high on the bridge of your nose, which can direct air into your eyes. Washing the mask daily with warm, soapy water and washing your face at night can help ensure a better, less irritating seal to your skin. If your mask comes with instructions on how to use and clean it, review them before using the mask and again, later, if you have problems.

You may need to ask RespicAir, P.C. to help you find a different size mask, particularly if your weight changes markedly, or try a different style device such as a nasal pillow. If you develop skin deterioration or sores, such as on your nose, tell your doctor promptly.

Difficulty falling asleep

This is a normal, temporary problem. Wearing the mask alone for some time during the day may help you get accustomed to how it feels. Using the ramp feature, which provides an automatic, gradual increase in the air pressure to your prescribed pressure setting as you fall asleep also may help. And practice good general sleep habits — exercise regularly, avoid caffeine and alcohol before bedtime, and try to relax. For example, take a warm bath before you go to bed. Avoid going to bed until you're tired.

Dry mouth

If you breathe through your mouth at night or sleep with your mouth open, some CPAP devices may worsen dry mouth. A chin strap may help keep your mouth closed and reduce the air leak if you wear a nasal mask. A full-face-mask-style device that covers your mouth and nose may also work well for you. A CPAP-heated humidifier that attaches to the air pressure machine also may help.

Unintentionally removing the CPAP device during the night

It's normal to sometimes wake up to find you've removed the mask in your sleep. If you move a lot in your sleep, you may find that a full face mask will stay on your face better. You may be pulling off the mask because your nose is congested. If so, ensuring a good mask fit and adding a CPAP-heated humidifier may help. A chin strap also may help keep the device on your face. If this is a consistent problem, consider setting an alarm for sometime in the night, to check whether the device is still on. You could progressively set the alarm for later in the night if you find you're keeping the device on longer.

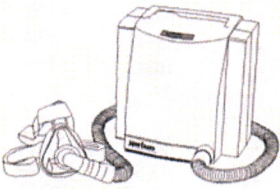
Annoyed by the noise

Most new models of CPAP devices are almost silent, but if you find a device's noise is bothersome, first check to make sure the device air filter is clean and unblocked. Something in its way may be contributing to noise. If this doesn't help, have your doctor or CPAP supplier check the device to ensure it's working properly. If the device is working correctly and the noise still bothers you, try wearing earplugs or using a white-noise sound machine to mask the noise.

Time and patience key to success

Using a CPAP device can be frustrating as you try to get used to it, but it's important you stick with it. The treatment is essential to avoiding sleep apnea-related complications such as heart problems and daytime fatigue. Work with your doctor and RespicAir to ensure the best fit and device for you, and try making adjustments if you're experiencing some of the common CPAP problems. It may take several months to find the correct settings for you and to adapt to the mask. With time and patience, CPAP can positively affect your quality of life and health.

CPAP UNITS



PURPOSE: Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) units are electrical devices that use a motor and a blower to maintain a flow of air that provides pressure to your airways, preventing them from collapsing. By keeping your airways open you can breathe uninterrupted during sleep. CPAP units require a doctor's order before use. You must always follow and abide by all manufacturers' operating and safety instructions.

TYPES: There are different types of CPAP units but they all function by applying low-pressure airflow to your airways. The air pressure holds your airways open, preventing the collapse of your palate and tongue for obstructing your air passages. Some CPAP units have a ramping feature that starts the air pressure at a lower pressure and gradually increases over time. This ramping feature can assist you in going to sleep.

ACCESSORIES: In order for the pressure from the CPAP unit to keep your airways open, a mask or nasal device must be used. These masks or nasal devices must be fitted to your face. There are many different kinds of nasal masks, nasal pillows, and oral devices to choose from to facilitate a good seal and maintain your comfort. If a headgear appliance is used to secure the mask or nasal pillows, it should be snug enough for a good fit in all sleeping positions. Your supplies have a useful life that varies depending upon use and will need to be replaced occasionally. These items usually can be setup on recurring delivery schedules so you don't have to make a special trip into your medical equipment company. These accessories also need separate prescriptions and must be properly fitted. Humidifiers are sometimes necessary to moisten the air.

USE: Each CPAP unit has one pressure setting that must be set and verified by your medical equipment company. Never adjust this pressure setting on your own. A good practice when preparing to go to bed is to put your headgear and mask (or pillows) on in front of a mirror. Once you have the headgear and mask on, get into bed and attach the tubing, then turn the unit on. It is acceptable to gradually work up to wearing the device the entire night. Your compliance with your physician's treatment plan is very important. No other piece of medical equipment alters your lifestyle like a CPAP unit. If you look at how many times you awaken each night, and the lack of restful sleep you have had, it is easy to learn to sleep with the CPAP device on.

MAINTENANCE: CPAP units should be kept clean by using a damp cloth and mild dishwashing detergent every few days. Never use alcohol or any alcohol-based solution to clean the unit. Always unplug the unit before cleaning. The CPAP unit must be completely dry before plugging back in. The air-inlet filter should be checked daily. If the filter is reusable, it should be able to withstand cleaning in a solution of lukewarm water and antibacterial dishwashing detergent and rinsed thoroughly with tap water. If disposable, the filter should be changed when dirty. Never clean your mask or nasal device in the dishwasher. Your tubing can be cleaned with the same antibacterial soap and water and hung vertically to dry. Always allow all CPAP accessories to completely air dry before reattaching them to the CPAP unit. Never attempt any repair on the CPAP unit. Each CPAP device should be regularly pressure checked according to manufacturer's guidelines. If you are using a humidifier, the *distilled* water must be drained and the humidifier cleaned daily.



CPAP AND BIPAP TIPS

WHEN SHOULD I USE MY CPAP/BIPAP?

- WEAR YOUR CPAP/BIPAP WHENEVER YOU SLEEP, INCLUDING NAPS. YOU HAVE SLEEP APNEA WHETHER IT IS DAY OR NIGHT. ALSO THIS WILL HELP YOU GET USED TO THE CPAP/BIPAP.
- CPAP/BIPAP MUST BE WORN EVERY NIGHT TO BE EFFECTIVE. SYMPTOMS MAY RETURN IF ANY NIGHTS ARE MISSED.
- TAKE YOUR CPAP/BIPAP WITH YOU WHEN YOU TRAVEL, OR ARE ADMITTED TO THE HOSPITAL.

CPAP/BIPAP SAFETY

- DO NOT EAT OR DRINK WHILE USING YOUR CPAP/BIPAP. YOU ARE LIKELY TO INHALE THE FOOD OR DRINK INTO YOUR LUNGS.
- AVOID EATING LARGE MEALS ONE TO TWO HRS PRIOR TO USING YOUR CPAP/BIPAP.

USING A HUMIDIFIER

- USING A CPAP/BIPAP HUMIDIFIER MAY HELP IMPROVE SOME NASAL SYMPTOMS BY PROVIDING WARMTH AND MOISTURE TO THE AIR.
- ONLY USE DISTILLED WATER.
- HUMIDIFIER UNITS SHOULD BE PLACED BELOW YOUR HEAD TO AVOID CONDENSATION INTO YOUR MASK AND TUBING WHILE YOU SLEEP.
- EMPTY YOUR HUMIDIFIER CHAMBER BEFORE MOVING YOUR UNIT TO ENSURE THE WATER DOES NOT ENTER YOUR MOTOR.