

CPAP

Sleep Disorders Program
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What is Obstructive Sleep Apnea?

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) occurs when your airway temporarily obstructs during sleep. You continue to make efforts to breathe but are unable to move air in and out of your lungs because of the obstruction. During the apnea, which can last for several seconds to over a minute, your blood oxygen level decreases and your breathing muscles continue to contract with a progressively greater effort until you awaken and resume breathing normally. After a few breaths, your oxygen level returns to normal. You fall back to sleep and the airway obstruction occurs again. This cycle may continue throughout the night, disrupting your normal sleep pattern. As a result, you may complain of unrefreshing sleep and excessive daytime sleepiness.

What is CPAP?

CPAP stands for Continuous Positive Airway Pressure. It is a non-surgical method of treating OSA. A bedside air compressor delivers a constant flow of air to your lungs through a mask that fits comfortably over your nose or through small nasal puffs fitted directly into your nose. The continuous pressure within your airway acts like a splint to prevent the airway from collapsing, which allows normal breathing while asleep. You get a normal sleep and are no longer sleepy during the day. CPAP has been designed for home use and is extremely effective when used every night.

What are the benefits of CPAP?

CPAP provides instant relief from OSA. There is usually a dramatic improvement in your symptoms such as daytime sleepiness and unrefreshing sleep within just a few nights use. CPAP relieves the strain on your heart and lungs caused by OSA and reduces high blood pressure and the risk of irregular heart rhythms. Weight reduction may also be easier due to increased stamina and energy. You may experience a general feeling of increased psychological well-being. CPAP treatment is safe with no major risks.

How is CPAP initiated?

CPAP is available only by prescription from one of the doctors associated with the Sleep Disorders Program. You are introduced to CPAP through a video which explains the basic operating principles, application of the machine and equipment care. A respiratory therapist will discuss the various machines available and associated costs. The therapist will also help you choose the correct mask and feel comfortable with the system. Depending on the equipment you select, you will be referred to one of the home care companies that supply CPAP. They are completely responsible for the maintenance of the equipment and should be contacted if you have any equipment-related questions. The company will discuss care of the equipment and proper cleaning techniques. The system can usually be picked up the same day as your orientation or arrangements can sometimes be made for delivery to your home. You will be required to present your CPAP prescription to the company.

You will be given an appointment with the doctor in about 2 to 3 weeks times, in order to monitor your progress and deal with any questions or problems you may have. A repeat sleep study while using CPAP will also be booked. This allows us to determine the correct pressure needed to completely relieve your OSA. Further follow-up with the doctor is scheduled as required. If several months pass between visits, a re-referral may be necessary.

How do I use CPAP at home?

Each night before going to sleep, simply put on the mask, adjust the headgear and turn the unit on. The machine plugs into a standard household electrical outlet.

The CPAP machine should be placed on the floor or on a low nightstand by the head of your bed. Since the unit draws in air, you should keep it away from heat sources and from confined or dusty areas. The home care supplier will explain how the CPAP parts fit together. The most important rule in using CPAP is to maintain a continuous flow of air between the air compressor and you. The mask should fit snugly over your nose so there is no air leakage when the machine is turned on. The mask is held comfortably in place by headstraps. You should learn to readjust the mask during the night if necessary. You should also try to keep your mouth closed while using CPAP since air escaping through your mouth will cause a drop in pressure. It may take a little practice to adjust to breathing through your nose but it does become easier with time.

How do I use CPAP?

CPAP is a permanent treatment for OSA and should be used whenever you sleep. Symptoms always reappear if CPAP is stopped, but this occurs gradually over a few days. You should not discontinue CPAP without first consulting the doctor at the Sleep Disorders Program.

Do I have to wear the mask all night long?

Yes. Studies have indicated that OSA is most severe during the early morning hours. It is, therefore, very important for you to use CPAP at all times during sleep. During the first few nights when you are adjusting to wearing the mask, it may be necessary to start with shorter periods and gradually increase the length of time until you can comfortably keep the mask on all night.

What do I do when I travel?

CPAP machines are portable enough for travel and most come with a handy carrying case. Some units have dual voltage capability for international travel and/or a DC adaptor for use with a battery when camping or boating.

What are the side effects associated with the use of CPAP?

The treatment may result in some drying or irritation of your nasal passages and can be difficult to use if you have a head cold. You may develop a runny nose, earache or experience a problem with sore eyes due to air leaking from your mask. This can usually be resolved by refitting the mask. Any ongoing problems should be discussed with your doctor at the Sleep Disorders Program. He/she can prescribe medications to help alleviate some of your discomfort. A humidifier attached to the CPAP machine may help. Use of a room humidifier can also help, but it must be placed about 8 feet away from the air inlet. Because the headgear must fit snugly, the mask may leave temporary marks on your face which will disappear a few minutes after you have removed the mask from your face. If, however, your skin becomes sore or inflamed, contact your doctor.

Payment for Nasal CPA

CPAP machines can be rented or purchased. Each company is responsible for setting the price and provides its own payment plan. Please note that the tubing and headgear must be purchased outright as it is for your personal use. At the present time, the cost of CPAP is not covered under the B.C. Medical Plan. Some extended benefits plans do cover a portion of the cost but this varies from one plan to another. The Department of Veterans Affairs and Ministry of Social Services and Housing usually pay for the equipment for eligible patients.

Helpful Hints...

1. Put the mask on and turn on the unit just as you are ready to turn out the lights and go to sleep.
2. Relax and breathe slowly and regularly against the flow of air through the mask.
3. Do not fight the pressure. It may feel unusual at first but it will not harm you—it will allow you to breathe normally while you sleep.
4. If your nose becomes dry and irritated, a humidifier can be positioned about 8 feet from the air inlet.
5. Contact the doctor if you have ongoing problems with nasal drying and irritation, sore eyes, earaches or a runny nose.
6. Your mask should be cleaned every morning with a gentle dish detergent. This will extend the life of your mask by preventing facial oils from hardening and ultimately ruining it. Your mask should be replaced on a regular basis.
7. Change the air filters regularly as recommended by the supplier.
8. There are a variety of different CPAP machines. They are all effective but you are encouraged to select the machine most appropriate to your needs and budget.
9. Have your CPAP machine serviced regularly as recommended by the home care company.
10. Questions about the equipment itself should be directed to the home care company.
11. Questions regarding the medical aspects of OSA and CPAP treatment should be directed to your doctor by calling 604-822-7606.

**For more information, please call the
Sleep Disorders Program
604-822-7606
http://www.vch.ca/sleep_disorders/**

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