

# CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure)

## What is CPAP?

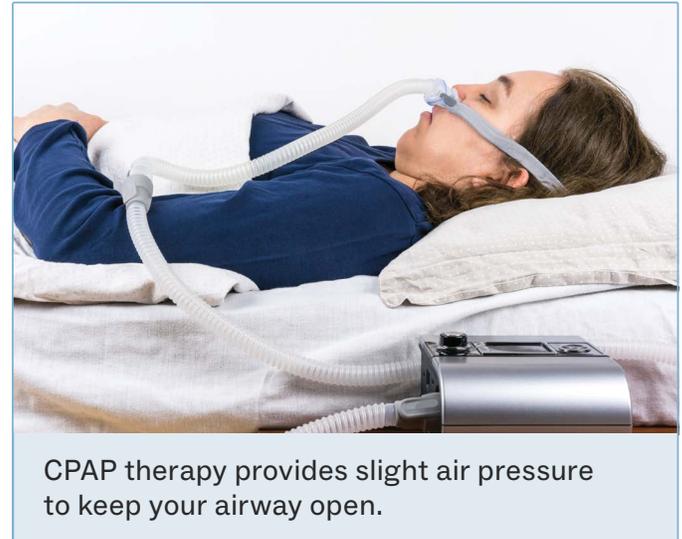
Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) is the most common and effective treatment for obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). CPAP uses a small machine to send a continuous flow of air into your airway while you sleep. The pressure from the air flow helps keep your airway open so you can breathe while sleeping.

Using CPAP every time you sleep will help you get more restful sleep. Your body will get the oxygen it needs, and you won't be waking to breathe.

### Other benefits include:

- Less snoring
- Better concentration
- More energy
- Less daytime drowsiness
- Improved mood, and fewer symptoms of depression
- Reduced risk of serious health conditions, including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes

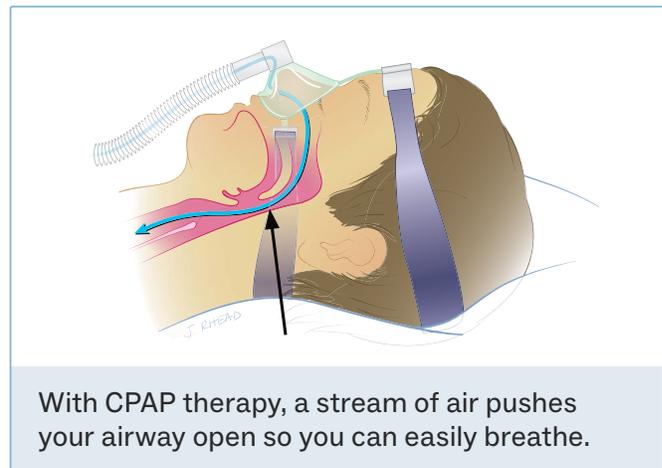
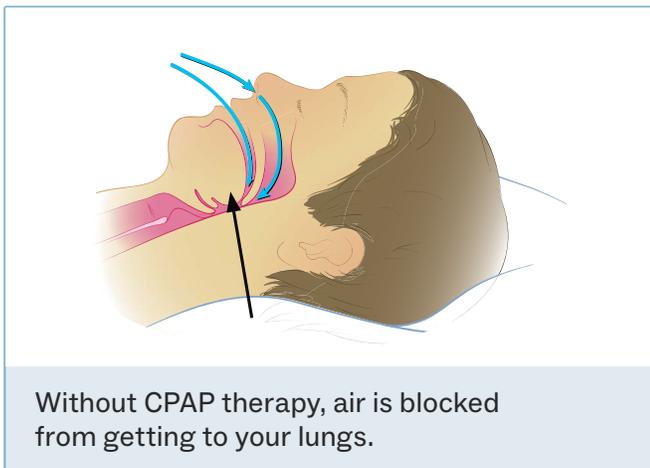
**OSA is considered a chronic or long-term health problem.** Even as you begin to feel better, you'll need to stay committed to your treatment plan—otherwise your sleep apnea will come back.



## How does CPAP work?

CPAP produces positive air pressure that keeps your airway open. A CPAP system has 3 general parts:

- **A flow generator**, which filters room air and produces positive air pressure. The flow generator is about the size of a tissue box and sits next your bed.
- **A mask or nasal piece** that delivers the filtered air to your nose.
- **An airflow hose** that connects the nasal piece or mask to the flow generator.



## How do I get started with CPAP?

### Talk to your insurance company

Before you begin CPAP, talk to your insurance company. Some things you should ask include:

- Which home medical equipment (HME) suppliers are in my network?
- Which CPAP machines are covered?
- What's the cost for the CPAP machine, and do I buy the machine or do I rent it?
- What are the costs on replacement supplies?

### Meet with an HME provider

After your doctor prescribes CPAP, you will meet with an HME provider who will help you fit your new equipment and answer questions about using it.

**When you meet with the HME provider, be sure to:**

- **Ask about equipment features.**
- **Tell them if you sleep on your back, side, or stomach.**
- **Get a good seal between your face and the mask.** If air leaks out of the mask, it can irritate your eyes.
- **Ask questions.** The more you know, the more comfortable you'll be as you start the new therapy.

### Have a sleep study

A sleep study may be needed in order to find and test the best settings for your CPAP machine.

Follow-up sleep studies may also be needed if:

- Signs or symptoms of OSA return.
- You lose more than 10% of your body weight.

## Equipment features

### Choosing a flow generator

Some flow generators have extra features that can make CPAP more pleasant, such as:

- **Heaters and humidifiers.** These make the air comfortable.
- **Pressure ramp.** This slowly increases air pressure as you fall asleep.
- **Exhalation pressure relief** (also called C-flex or A-flex). This lowers the air pressure when you breathe out.

### Choosing a mask

When choosing a mask, think about how you move and breathe while you sleep. The 3 most common mask types are:

- **Nose masks.** Covers just the nose.
- **Nose and mouth masks.** Covers the nose and mouth.
- **Nasal pillows.** A small nosepiece with ends that fit inside each nostril. These may work if you have trouble sleeping with a mask.

## Living with CPAP long-term

**The only way to get the full benefit of CPAP therapy is to use it every time you sleep.** It can take time to adjust to CPAP. But as you do, you'll feel better.

You'll need to learn to clean and maintain your CPAP equipment. This includes a daily cleaning of the mask seal and a weekly cleaning of the humidifier, straps, hose, and filter.

**To clean your equipment,** use warm, soapy water and rinse thoroughly. For a deeper clean, use a solution of vinegar and water (1 part vinegar to 3 parts water). Let the part soak for 30 minutes and then rinse completely.

**To disinfect,** use a mixture of hydrogen peroxide and water (3 capfuls hydrogen peroxide to 1 cup water). Let the part soak for 30 minutes and then rinse completely. **Do not use cleaning chemicals, alcohol, or bleach.**

### Replacement supplies

Pieces of the CPAP system should be replaced regularly. Manufacturers recommend you replace your supplies as follows:

How often?	Replace
Every month	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nasal pillow or mask cushion</li><li>• Air filter</li></ul>
Every 3 to 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mask</li><li>• Tubing</li></ul>
Every 6 to 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Headgear</li><li>• Chin strap</li><li>• Water chamber</li></ul>
Please contact your insurance company to find how often they will pay for replacements.	

## Tips for adjusting to CPAP

To treat your sleep apnea, you need to use CPAP every night and every time you take a nap. As with any treatment, **CPAP helps only if you use it consistently**. If you run into problems at first, don't give up. There are many ways to make things better.

Problem/concern	Possible cause	Tips
My mask is new and uncomfortable; I'm afraid I won't be able to sleep with it.	You need time to get used to the mask.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wear the mask for short periods in the evening for a few days before you start wearing it to bed.</li> </ul>
I don't like the sound of the equipment. The flow generator is noisy.	The flow generator is too close. The air filter might be blocked.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get a longer hose.</li> <li>Move the flow generator further away or lower than your bed.</li> <li>Check to make sure the air filter is clean and not blocked by outside items.</li> </ul>
I get skin irritation, pressure sores, or blisters.	The headgear straps might be too loose or tight. Your mask might not fit well. Your mask may also be worn out or dirty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Readjust your headgear straps. The mask should be as loose as possible while still creating a seal.</li> <li>Talk to your HME provider about the mask fit. You might consider a full face mask or nasal pillows for a better fit.</li> <li>Check the mask for stiffness or cracks. Replace the mask if needed.</li> <li>Wash your face nightly. Wipe off the mask seal daily.</li> </ul>
My throat gets dry, or I get a stuffy or runny nose or nosebleeds.	Dry air.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get a heated humidifier for your CPAP equipment.</li> <li>Try a saline nose spray at bedtime and when you wake up.</li> <li>Ask your doctor about a nasal steroid (such as Flonase, Nasarel, or Nasonex) or a nasal spray with ipratropium bromide (such as Atrovent).</li> <li>Ask your doctor about using an oral antihistamine.</li> <li>This problem may go away naturally over time. If not, call your doctor.</li> </ul>
My mouth gets dry.	You might be sleeping with your mouth open.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try a chin strap, or consider a full face mask with a heated humidifier.</li> </ul>
My eyes get sore, dry, red, or swollen.	Air might be leaking from your mask into your eyes, or your mask might be too tight.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try adjusting your headgear straps. Make sure the mask has a good seal with your face, without being too tight.</li> <li>Wash your face nightly — skin oil or cosmetics can interfere with the seal.</li> <li>Check the mask for stiffness or cracks. Replace the mask if needed.</li> </ul>
I'm swallowing air and my stomach is bloated.	The air pressure might be more than you can breathe in as you go to sleep, or you may sleep with your mouth open.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If your CPAP equipment has a pressure ramp feature, use it.</li> <li>Consider using a chin strap.</li> <li>This problem may go away naturally over time. If not, talk to your doctor about bilevel positive airway pressure (BPAP) or autotitrating positive airway pressure (APAP) equipment.</li> </ul>
My sinuses or chest hurts or I have trouble breathing out.	The air pressure might be more than you can breathe in as you first go to sleep.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If your CPAP equipment has a pressure ramp feature or exhalation pressure relief (C-flex or A-flex), use it.</li> <li>If this problem doesn't go away over time, talk to your doctor about bilevel positive airway pressure (BPAP) or autotitrating positive airway pressure (APAP) equipment.</li> </ul>
My bed partner doesn't like the equipment.	Your bed partner might not understand how important CPAP is to your health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give your bed partner this fact sheet and other materials that explain sleep apnea and CPAP.</li> <li>Get your partner involved in a patient support group.</li> <li>Ask your bed partner to be patient. As you begin to use CPAP regularly, he or she will see positive changes that make up for any inconvenience caused by the equipment.</li> </ul>

## What to do in special situations

Follow the guidelines below on using CPAP while you're traveling, having surgery, or getting over a cold:

- **If you travel**, take the equipment with you. You should keep using CPAP therapy even if you're away from home for just one night.
- **When flying**, it's best to take the CPAP unit as a carry-on item. Check with the airline - some do not count medical equipment against your carry-on limit.
- **If you have surgery**, bring your CPAP equipment with you to the hospital. Healthcare providers in the recovery room will put it on you to help you breathe as you come out of the anesthesia.
- **If you have a cold or sinus infection**, try to continue the CPAP — using an oral decongestant or antihistamine can help. And make sure to clean your CPAP equipment (see page 3) to make sure it doesn't reinfect you.

## Talking with your doctor about CPAP therapy

The table below lists the most common potential benefits, risks, and alternatives for CPAP therapy. Other benefits and risks may apply in your unique medical situation. Talking with your doctor and other healthcare providers is the most important part of learning about your treatment. Don't hesitate to ask questions.

Possible benefits	Risks and possible complications	Alternatives
<p>Benefits of consistent CPAP therapy can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better concentration</li> <li>• Less daytime drowsiness</li> <li>• Better mood, fewer symptoms of depression</li> <li>• Less snoring</li> <li>• Reduced risk of several serious health conditions, including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes</li> </ul>	<p>CPAP therapy is extremely safe. Any complications can usually be addressed by making adjustments (see troubleshooting table on <b>page 3</b>). Complications can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skin irritation, sores, eye irritation, or air leaks if the mask doesn't fit well or rubs your face</li> <li>• Nasal congestion</li> <li>• Dry or sore throat</li> <li>• Swallowed air, which can lead to gassiness or bloating</li> </ul>	<p>Alternatives to CPAP therapy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autotitrating positive airway pressure (APAP)</li> <li>• Bilevel positive airway pressure (BPAP)</li> <li>• Dental appliances that hold the tongue up and/or forward</li> <li>• Surgery to shrink, stiffen, or remove tissue from the back of the throat</li> </ul>

Need help or have questions about your equipment?

Please call your HME provider: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Scan this QR Code for helpful information:



Intermountain Health complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex. Se proveen servicios de interpretación gratis. Hable con un empleado para solicitarlo. 我們將根據您的需求提供免費的口譯服務。請找尋工作人員協助。

©2014–2023 Intermountain Health. All rights reserved. The content presented here is for your information only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, and it should not be used to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. Please consult your healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns. More health information is available at [intermountainhealthcare.org](http://intermountainhealthcare.org). FS132 - 06/23 (Last reviewed -06/23) Also available in Spanish.