

HELPFUL TIPS FOR PAP THERAPY IN THE TREATMENT OF SLEEP APNEA

If you have been diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnea (OSA), treatment is incredibly important for your ongoing health. When OSA continues without treatment, sufferers are more likely to experience health complications such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, increased risk of accidents, memory loss, cognitive impairment and depression.

Once you have been diagnosed with sleep apnea, the most common treatment is a positive airway pressure (PAP) machine. PAP works by using air pressure to hold the airway open during sleep. With your airway supported, you're able to get a full night's rest. Getting comfortable with your PAP machine is crucial if you're going to use it. Solutions are available for almost all of the common PAP issues.

My Mask Leaks

If your mask doesn't keep an airtight seal, then air pressure can't support your airway properly. If your first mask does not fit, you may have to replace it with a different one. There are many different mask styles and fits. Contact your durable medical equipment (DME) vendor to talk about what style might be best for you.

Skin oils can also worsen the seal - mask fit can be improved by washing it daily.

I Am Getting a Stuffy Nose or Sinus Headaches

Your PAP machine has a humidifier attachment; increasing the humidity can make it easier to breathe throughout the night and keep your nose from drying out. You can also try using a saline spray or saline gel at bedtime to ease dryness. If this does not work, ask your sleep specialist whether additional medications are needed.

I Experience Claustrophobia or a Sense of Panic When I Put the Mask On

Getting used to a PAP mask can be difficult, but once you get used to it, most users will not go to sleep without it. Here is what we recommend:



How Can I Learn More?

- Talk to your board-certified sleep medicine physician.
- Visit www.sleepeducation.org

1. *Make sure that your mask fits your face well. If it pinches or hurts, let your DME vendor know. There are many mask styles and fits.*
2. *Gradually work up to using your PAP. Start by just holding the mask up to your face and breathing deeply. Don't put the strap on at first or fasten it in any way. After you become more comfortable, wear the mask during the day as you relax, such as watching TV or reading a book. Next, attach the hose to the mask, and wear that. Finally, try wearing the mask and hose while you relax and turn on the air pressure.*

If you are still uncomfortable, speak to your sleep specialist. The air pressure may be at the wrong setting, or you may need medication to help you relax and become accustomed to the PAP machine.

I Can't Fall Asleep With the Mask on my Face

This is a common problem, and is usually temporary. The first recommendation is to use the machine during the day while relaxing to get accustomed to the feeling. Next, use the ramp feature, available on most PAP machines, which gradually increases the air pressure, so that you're not overwhelmed. Finally, practice good

sleep hygiene. Go to bed when you're tired, keep your sleeping space dark and cool, and avoid caffeine after the middle of your day.

Use your PAP machine every night for as long as you comfortably can. Take it off when you have to, and then try again the next night. You'll quickly find that you can sleep with the device in place.

For some people, a short course of a sleep aid may be necessary. Speak with your sleep specialist if you continue to have trouble falling asleep with the PAP mask.

I Keep Pulling the Mask off While I'm Sleeping

First, speak to your DME vendor. This may be an issue with the mask feeling uncomfortable or having a poor fit, and changing the mask may help. If you have a dry mouth, this might be because of increased sinus congestion or low humidity.

Many newer PAP machines have a "mask alarm" that will alert you if the mask is removed during the night. Talk to your DME vendor to make sure the alarm is on.

If that doesn't resolve your issue, consider setting an alarm at night to make sure that your mask is still in place. If you begin to wake and find that the mask is still where it's supposed to be, set the alarm progressively later.

The Machine Is Too Noisy

This complaint is almost always about older PAP machines. Most modern machines are nearly silent, and are generally no louder than white noise machines. If your new machine is loud, the first thing to do is to check the filter, and make sure that it is not blocked.

Next, ensure that your mask or tubing is not leaking. Sometimes condensation of water in the tubing can cause noise and make the PAP ineffective. Consider using a heated tubing or putting the hose in an insulating sleeve. If this problem continues, consider lowering the humidifier setting.

If you continue to feel that the machine is too loud, speak to your DME vendor. The machine may be malfunctioning, and they should be able to service it or set you up with a new machine.

All This Bother – Is It Worth It?

We certainly think so. The health problems caused by OSA are dramatic. PAP therapy is incredibly effective if you stick with it. It will make your entire life healthier.

If you are having trouble with your PAP therapy, make sure to reach out to your sleep specialist or your DME vendor. They will help you find a solution that works.



Questions For Your Physician

Take a few minutes to write your questions for the next time you see your healthcare provider.



Sample Questions:

Why do I feel tired all the time?

Why do I wake up so early in the morning?

