



CONTINUOUS POSITIVE AIRWAY PRESSURE

HOW CPAP WORKS

WHAT IS CPAP?

If you suffer from moderate-severe sleep apnea Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) is the most successful treatment.

HOW DOES CPAP WORK?

CPAP is a very simple mechanical aid to help keep the airway open. In sleep apnea, repeated collapse of your airway stops you breathing and leads to problems such as lack of oxygen, disrupted sleep and increased risk of strokes and heart attacks.

CPAP prevents the airway closing by blowing air through the nose and into the upper airways keeping them open, a bit like blowing up a bicycle inner tube that has deflated. This pressure is applied continuously throughout the night to prevent the airways closing. The airflow is generated by a pump or blower that is small, quiet and extremely reliable. CPAP usually plugs into your power point but many are also able to operate from a battery.

HOW IS THE PRESSURE APPLIED TO THE AIRWAY?

The most commonly used method for applying the pressure is by the use of a soft mask that is shaped to seal against the face or into the nose. Masks may fit over the nose only or both nose and mouth (for mouth breathers). Getting a satisfactory fit of the mask to the face is the most difficult part of CPAP treatment. Although masks have improved dramatically over the years, a number of people still have difficulty adapting to them and it is really important that you find a mask that suits you.

WHAT IS HUMIDIFICATION?

Most CPAP machines can be used with a humidifier, which is a device that warms and adds moisture to the air you breathe making it more comfortable.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO WORK?

CPAP works immediately in stopping your sleep apnea. Some people notice immediate improvement in their daytime symptoms, such as tiredness, but others find it takes some time to get used



to CPAP and gain maximum benefit.

HOW LONG WILL I NEED TO USE CPAP?

CPAP does not cure sleep apnea; it simply controls the symptoms by keeping the airway open. If you stop using CPAP your airway will once again close and you will experience apnea.

DO I NEED TO USE CPAP EVERY NIGHT?

Yes. When you stop using CPAP your apnea will return as will your daytime symptoms. Recent studies show the more you use it the more benefit you gain. If you have a cold or flu you may be advised not to use your CPAP while nasal symptoms are severe. As soon as you are comfortable with it you should start using it again.

TRAVELING WITH YOUR CPAP

CAN I TAKE MY CPAP OVERSEAS?

Most CPAP machines can operate on other voltages, such as 110V, some adjust automatically, others have a switch. If your machine cannot operate at different voltages you can purchase a transformer or hire a machine able to operate overseas. Remember the power adaptor plugs.

CAN I USE MY CPAP ON AN AIRPLANE OR SHIP?

Consult with the airline or ship to find out the voltage that is available and then confirm with your CPAP supplier that your pump will operate at this voltage. The airline will generally require a medical certificate and may only approve the use of specific units during flight. As these arrangements with airlines can take some time it is best to commence these well before the date of departure.

Even if you are not using your CPAP

during the flight, take your CPAP as hand baggage. If you have a medical certificate, it may be allowed as an additional piece. If you are going to a non-English speaking country, get your medical certificate translated.

CAN I USE MY CPAP WHILE CAMPING?

Some machines operate on 12 VDC so they can be used while camping. If the environment is colder than your bedroom, you can run CPAP tubes under the bedclothes to warm the air or consider the hire or purchase of a heated humidifier.

Some newer CPAP machines are able to operate directly from a battery in which case you will only need the adaptor from car to CPAP machine. Other machines will operate if a suitable inverter is used.

HOW LONG WILL MY CPAP RUN ON A BATTERY?

A car battery will operate a modern CPAP machine (through an inverter) for at least 8 hours. However, if you are dependent on that battery to start your car in the morning, check this out before you find yourself stuck with a flat battery. If you can afford to buy a second battery, a deep cycle marine or recreational vehicle battery will work. An auto electrician could arrange for this to be charged from your car's alternator while traveling. A battery charger may also be a good investment when you can use mains power to recharge the battery.

IF I USE OXYGEN WITH CPAP CAN I STILL USE A BATTERY POWER SOURCE?

No. Any minor spark from the equipment can cause a fire if oxygen is in use. If you are dependent on oxygen, consult your specialist before any activity that might place you at risk.

CLEANING YOUR CPAP

Regularly cleaning your CPAP machine and its components is important for its function and longevity. These guidelines should NOT replace the equipment manufacturer's instructions.

HEAD STRAPS: Wash the head straps once a week. Hand wash using warm soapy water, rinse thoroughly and squeeze out excess water. Leave to dry away from direct sunlight.

MASKS: Clean your mask every morning. Wash the mask in warm (not hot) soapy water, avoiding detergents and bleaches, as these may damage your mask. Rinse the mask of soapy residue, shake off excess water and leave to dry.

TUBING: When using a humidifier, rinse the tubing with water daily and hang to drip-dry. If you don't use a humidifier, rinse the tubing monthly.

FILTERS: All CPAP machines have dust filters that must be cleaned and/or changed periodically. It is

recommended you check your filter every two weeks and clean it if necessary according to the manufacturer's instructions (often vacuum or rinsing is suggested). Replace it at least every six months, or more often if you live in a dusty environment.

HUMIDIFIERS: The humidifier chambers should be emptied, rinsed and dried daily.

WATER FOR YOUR HUMIDIFIER: Manufacturers recommend using distilled water, because it contains no impurities. Do not use tap water, as it may contain chemicals and particles that settle on the bottom of the water chamber. If not cleaned regularly, this sediment will be hard to remove and may prematurely age the metal heating plate. If you have not been using distilled water, you may notice sediment build-up at the bottom of the water tank. Try cleaning the chamber with a white vinegar and water solution, then rinse with clear water and air dry. This routine will help remove any residue and disinfect the water chamber. Never use antibacterial soaps, bleach or other harsh chemicals in the water chamber.

ABOUT US

Sleep Disorders Australia (SDA) is a voluntary not-for-profit organisation that provides information and support to people affected by sleep disorders throughout Australia. SDA advocates the needs of people with sleep disorders by raising awareness of sleep disorders and their impact on our lives. We also offer support and education with regards to preventing and treating sleep disorders.


We would be delighted if you joined us. Membership is open to sufferers, family members, medical professionals, and the general public. You can join via our website or email our membership officer for more information.

If you would like to support us financially, you can donate via our website or send a cheque to our address.

CONTACT INFO


 www.sleepoz.org.au

 admin@sleepoz.org.au

 Sleep Disorders Australia
PO Box 5278 Algester Qld 4115

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DISCLAIMER: Information in this fact sheet is general in nature and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Discuss with your doctor if you are concerned about your sleep or other medical conditions.

