

TRAVELING WITH CPAP



Traveling with CPAP: CPAP treatment for sleep apnea may not be the most convenient thing to use but it should not be a constraint on lifestyle. There are several options that you should be aware of that allow you to travel, to go camping and to enjoy normal daytime recreational activities while maintaining your CPAP treatment at night.

Do I need to use CPAP every night? When you were diagnosed with sleep apnea, you had probably suffered from the condition and been untreated for a number of years. One more night without CPAP is unlikely to put you at risk. However, you should understand that as soon as you stop using CPAP your breathing during the night will deteriorate and your daytime symptoms will return. You may experience morning headaches, daytime tiredness and irritability similar to that you experienced before starting CPAP. Everyone is different, but these symptoms can recur after the first night without CPAP. Daytime tiredness is a particular problem. This will put you at increased risk of road accidents and when it occurs in the context of a motoring holiday may be a deadly combination. If you are tired, do not drive - you and others will be at risk.

Can I use my CPAP in other countries? Before journeying overseas you should consult your sleep clinic or supplier of CPAP machines for information about the suitability of your machine for use in another country. In general most current machines are able to operate on other voltages, such as 110V in the United States, some adjusting automatically, others requiring adjustment of a switch. However, you must check this. If your machine cannot operate at different voltages it may be necessary to purchase a transformer or to hire a machine able to operate in the country you are to visit. If your machine is suitable, don't forget the necessary adaptor plugs.

Will the pressure delivered change in different countries? This is dependent on the type of machine that you use. Some machines deliver less pressure if the air pressure is less, for example if you are at a higher altitude than at home (eg the mountains). Other machines will adjust for this effect. Your sleep may also be different at different altitudes so the requirements for pressure may vary. In general the effects are quite small and it is better to use the CPAP, even if it is not at an optimal pressure, than not to use it.

Can I use my CPAP on a ship or plane? Cruise ships and long distance airplanes are equipped with power outlets that are suitable for use with most CPAP machines. You must consult with the airline or shipping line concerned to find out the voltage that is available to you and then confirm with your clinic or supplier that the pump will operate at this voltage. The airline will generally require completion of a medical certificate by your doctor 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. If you are worried about being conspicuous in the use of CPAP on the flight you should consider the alternative which may be an extremely disrupted sleep accompanied by loud snoring. Both you and your fellow passengers would be far better off with a quiet CPAP machine.

Are there any precautions to take when transporting my CPAP equipment? If your CPAP is damaged in transit your holiday may be a difficult and unhappy time. It is strongly recommended that even if you are not using your CPAP during the flight that you take the CPAP equipment on board as part of your hand baggage. Make sure that your equipment is carried in a sturdy, protective bag. Airlines are used to dealing with people carrying their medical equipment and, when the situation is explained, will in general agree to this as an additional piece of cabin baggage. As an additional precaution, it is a good idea to get an explanatory letter from your specialist physician for use if you run into any problems with customs or airlines. If you are going to a non-English speaking country it may be a good idea to get this translated into the appropriate language.

Can I use my CPAP while camping? If you are going to a camping ground where normal mains power is available you should always use your CPAP. If you are concerned about the environment being much colder than your bedroom, you should discuss this with your sleep clinic or supplier before leaving. Some simple remedies such as running CPAP tubes under the bedclothes may be sufficient to warm the inspired air. Alternatively, you may need to consider hire or purchase of a heated humidifier.

Can I use a my CPAP with a battery? Using CPAP with a battery requires some planning and you need to consult your CPAP supplier well before leaving on your holiday. 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. An inverter is a device that takes input from a battery (12V DC), and makes it into a similar voltage to normal mains power (240V AC). You should be aware that different inverters may vary in their characteristics and some may be more suitable than others for use with your CPAP machine. Use of an inverter that is unsuitable for your machine may shorten the life of the CPAP machine by placing greater stress on the motor. It is very important that you consult the supplier of your CPAP for information about which inverters are recommended.

How long will my CPAP run on a battery? This is very dependent on the type of CPAP machine and the pressure delivered. Older CPAP machines tend to use more power and when the pressure delivered is higher, more power is used. In general a well charged car battery will operate a modern CPAP machine (through an inverter) for at least 8 hours. However, it is important that if you are dependent on that battery to start your car in the morning, you check this out before finding yourself stuck with a flat battery. If you can afford to buy a second battery, a deep cycle marine or recreational vehicle battery would be a good investment. An auto electrician could arrange for this to be charged from your car's alternator while traveling. In this way you will not be dependent on your CPAP battery to start the car. A battery charger may also be a good investment for those times when you can use mains power to recharge the battery.

Can I use a heated humidifier with a battery and inverter? For older humidifiers this is generally NOT recommended. Some may not control the temperature when operating from an inverter, however newer units that can be used with an inverter are available. If you feel you are dependent on a humidifier you should consult your CPAP supplier before attempting to use it with a battery. There may be other options such as an unheated humidifier or the use of a low wattage infra-red globe to warm the inspired air.

If I use oxygen with CPAP can I still use a battery power source? Unfortunately, this is not recommended. Any minor spark from the equipment can cause a fire if oxygen is in use. If you are dependent on oxygen, even at night, you must consult your specialist physician before commencing any activity such as a camping trip which might place you at risk.

IMPORTANT - CHECK WITH YOUR CPAP SUPPLIER - Use of CPAP with other than normal mains voltage may pose special problems or risks and may void your warranty. The supplier of your CPAP machine should always be consulted before undertaking this.

DISCLAIMER - Information provided in this fact sheet is general in content and should not be seen as a substitute for professional medical advice. Concerns over sleep or other medical conditions should be discussed with your family doctor.

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