

Patient Information

Respiratory

Continuous positive airways pressure (CPAP) treatment

You have been diagnosed with sleep apnoea and you have been prescribed continuous positive airways pressure (CPAP) to treat your obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA). CPAP (pronounced see-pap) is a well established and effective treatment for OSA.

How does CPAP work?

CPAP works by acting as a “mechanical splint”. It blows air at pressure into the back of the throat to keep the airway open during sleep. It prevents the airways from collapsing which helps to maintain correct oxygen levels while you sleep. This is achieved by wearing a tight-fitting mask or nasal plugs when you go to sleep.

There are many different mask systems and sizes. You will be fitted with a suitable mask system or nasal plugs and given information on how to clean and care for this equipment.

It is usual for you to be issued with an auto-setting CPAP machine for a 3-week trial period.

People often find that it takes several weeks to become accustomed to using the CPAP machine and wearing the mask. You should find that if you were sleepy before, it soon makes you feel much more awake during the day.



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You should have better quality sleep as your sleep is no longer disturbed by obstructions to your breathing. Your bed partner should also have a better night's sleep as your snoring will be much reduced.

It is normal to have some difficulty adjusting to the idea of having to use this machine. The physiologist looking after you will be experienced in all the problems that can occur when you first start this treatment and will be happy to help find the best alternatives to help you tolerate your treatment.

If after 1 week problems have not resolved themselves, then you should contact the Respiratory Physiology and Sleep Department for advice:
Telephone 024 7696 6734.

After 4 weeks of being issued your CPAP machine, we will make a telephone appointment with you to discuss your therapy data. We will use this appointment to discuss any remaining symptoms and troubleshoot any issues you are having with therapy, if required.

Associated risks of CPAP treatment

Common side effects of CPAP treatment include rhinitis or a dry mouth or throat.

If this happens, a humidifier may improve symptoms. Sore red eyes can occur if there is a leak with your mask, adjusting your mask and fitting it correctly will improve these symptoms.

On occasions, the mask can cause sores on the bridge the nose. Common causes for this are over tightening the mask, or the mask not being cleaned correctly. If this occurs, you should contact the department immediately and refrain from using your mask until the sore has healed.

A rare side effect is gulping air. This can cause bloating and a sore stomach. To overcome this issue, we can reduce the pressure of your CPAP device.

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If you are experiencing any of these problems, please contact the Respiratory Physiology and Sleep Department for advice.

Looking after your CPAP equipment

Mask and tubing

Your mask and headgear will need washing at least once a week to keep it clean. You can wash it with soapy water (mild soap or washing up liquid), rinse in clean water and leave to air dry. Headgear can also be taken off the mask and washed in a machine.

The CPAP tubing doesn't normally have to be washed unless it looks dirty, but it is useful to look along the tube checking for signs of wear and tear or holes.

Machine

The outside of your CPAP machine can be wiped clean with a damp cloth on a weekly basis. At the back of the machine is a sponge filter, which filters out the dust. This can be accessed easily. Once a month you should rinse it with water and place back into the machine when dry.

Humidifier

Lastly, if you have a humidifier attached to your CPAP Machine, you will need to clean that about once every 2 weeks with mild soap and water. If there is a build-up of lime scale, it can be cleaned once a month by filling it with half vinegar and half water and let it soak for about 30 minutes before rinsing.

Frequently asked questions

How often do I need to use my CPAP treatment?

Ideally, you should use your CPAP every time you sleep whether this is at night or an afternoon nap. The DVLA guidelines recommend a minimum of 5 nights a week for a minimum of 4 hours per night.

Do I have to notify the DVLA or my motor insurance company?

If you have Sleep apnoea you may need to inform the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). Research has shown drivers with OSA with daytime tiredness have reduced vigilance and can fall asleep at the wheel which increases the risk of road traffic accidents.

Any driver is legally responsible for his or her vigilance, and thus an accident due to falling asleep for any reason is deemed the driver's fault.

The DVLA guidelines state:

- You do not need to stop driving, nor inform the DVLA if before treatment of your obstructive sleep apnoea, you did not experience symptoms of daytime sleepiness that are of a severity likely to impair driving.
- However, it is a legal requirement you should inform the DVLA (but not cease driving) if you declared that you were tired prior to treatment, and you are now successfully using CPAP or mandibular positioning therapy. If you are compliant with treatment and your symptoms are controlled such that they no longer impair driving, your licence should not be affected.
- You have a legal requirement to inform the DVLA and stop driving if: you are diagnosed with OSAS, where the symptoms include sufficient sleepiness to impair driving and you refuse or are not compliant with treatment.

This guidance is applicable to both Group 1 and Group 2 drivers. In addition, for Group 2 drivers, compliance with treatment and ongoing symptom control must be assessed on a regular, usually annual basis, by the sleep service.

People should not be concerned about notifying the DVLA. Once you start using CPAP regularly, there is no reason why you cannot drive, and this department is happy to complete DVLA medical forms.

Motor insurance

Please remember that your insurance company is entitled to request medical details for any condition currently under treatment, as are the

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police following serious accidents. If OSA is undeclared, your insurer may refuse to support any claim.

Please check with your policy if you are required to declare new medical disorders.

Should I notify my doctor of my CPAP treatment?

Your GP and consultant will have been notified of your CPAP treatment. If you ever have to attend hospital, especially as an emergency admission, then it would be wise to either bring your CPAP machine with you into hospital, or at the earliest opportunity tell the nurse or doctor looking after you.

Can I take my CPAP machine away on holiday?

You can take your machine away on holiday with you, including abroad. Our machines are multi-voltage and therefore can use any voltage without changing any settings (you may need an adapter). People take CPAP machines all over the world.

CPAP machines can be used in boats and caravans if you obtain a suitable battery/connector. It is important that you use your CPAP on holiday if you are planning to drive.

If you are planning to travel by plane, you can request a customs letter from us to go through airport security. It is important to take the CPAP as hand luggage on the plane as it could get damaged in the hold.

CPAP machines are quite common pieces of medical equipment, and it will be usual for the security staff to X-ray or scan the equipment, which will not harm the machine.

What do I do if I have a problem or need further advice?

If you have further questions or have a problem with your CPAP equipment, please contact the Respiratory Physiology Department on the telephone number or email below for advice over the phone or to arrange an appointment to see a physiologist.

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Unfortunately, due to the high numbers of patients on CPAP, we cannot see patients without a pre-arranged appointment.

Respiratory Physiology Department: Telephone 024 7696 6734

Email: GMBSleep@uhcw.nhs.uk

Open: Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm

Other leaflet you might find useful: **How to look after my CPAP equipment.** Please ask staff who can provide you with a copy of the leaflet.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 6734 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

Did we get it right?

We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.

Have your say. Scan the QR code or visit:

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