

# Long-term continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) treatment

Information for patients



We have given you this leaflet because you have been diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) and have started long-term continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) treatment. It explains what OSA is, what long-term CPAP treatment for OSA involves and how to use and look after the CPAP treatment equipment safely at home. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details below.

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

#### Adult sleep service

Telephone: **023 8120 1947** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm)

Email: [adultsleepservice@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:adultsleepservice@uhs.nhs.uk)

**Alternatively, you can attend our walk-in clinic, which runs every Monday, 9am to 11am and every Thursday, 1.30pm to 3.30pm (excluding bank holidays) in our adult sleep service department, which is located on the second floor of Lymington New Forest Hospital.**

Adult sleep service  
Wilverley Clinics  
2nd floor  
Lymington New Forest Hospital  
Ampress Park  
Wellworthy Road  
Lymington  
Hampshire  
SO41 8QD

**People with pacemakers and other metallic medical devices implanted in their body cannot have or be around CPAP masks that contain magnets. It is important that you let us know if you or anyone within your household has a metallic medical device implanted, so we can explore non-magnetic mask options with you.**

### What is obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA)?

Sleep apnoea is when your breathing stops and starts while you sleep. It can cause your oxygen levels to drop briefly in the night and disrupt your sleep. The most common type is called obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA).

Untreated OSA can disrupt the quality of your sleep, making you feel sleepy during the day, and can lead to other health problems, such as:

- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- a higher chance of having a stroke
- depression or mood changes
- Parkinson's disease (a condition in which parts of the brain become progressively damaged over many years)
- heart failure (when the heart is unable to pump blood around the body properly)
- a higher chance of having a road traffic accident due to fatigue (extreme tiredness) and/or daytime sleepiness

### What causes OSA?

OSA happens if your airways become too narrow or collapse while you sleep, stopping you from breathing properly. OSA can be caused by several different things, including:

- being overweight
- getting older
- having nose and/or throat problems
- having certain physical features (for example, a receded jaw line or an oversized tongue)
- smoking and drinking alcohol
- using sleeping tablets (as these relax your airway muscles)

## What are the symptoms of OSA?

Symptoms of OSA include:

- breathing stopping and starting while you sleep
- gasping and choking noises while you sleep
- disrupted sleep or waking up often
- loud snoring
- restless sleep
- frequent visits to the toilet

During the day, you may also:

- feel very tired and sleepy
- find it hard to concentrate
- fall asleep involuntarily or need to nap regularly
- have mood swings
- be forgetful
- have a headache and/or a dry mouth when you wake up

## How is OSA treated?

Most people with OSA need long-term continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) treatment. However, making lifestyle changes like losing weight, giving up smoking and reducing how much alcohol you drink can improve the severity of your OSA and sometimes even treat it completely.

## What is CPAP treatment?

CPAP treatment is a non-invasive form of ventilation that is used at night.

It is made up of three parts:

- a CPAP machine (an air pump)
- a mask that covers your nose (and sometimes your mouth)
- a tube that connects the CPAP machine and the mask

The CPAP machine gently pumps pressurised air through the mask into your airways, to hold them open and prevent them from narrowing while you sleep. The machine will also prevent you from snoring while you sleep.

This is currently the most effective treatment for OSA, but it must be used every night for the entire duration of your sleep to achieve the best results.

### The CPAP machine

A CPAP machine blows air from the room under pressure through a dust filter and then through a tube to a mask. It is powered from an ordinary power supply. The CPAP machine should not be noisy.

### The mask

Masks for CPAP treatment come in many different styles and sizes, so we will help you to choose the right one for you at your trial appointment. All masks will have:

- a flexible cushion (this is the part that will rest against your face)
- an L-shaped connector (this is what one end of the tubing will connect to and the other end will connect to the CPAP machine)
- an outlet port called an exhalation valve (this valve must never be covered as it allows the air you breathe out to escape so you don't breathe it back in)

Masks usually tend to last about six months before needing to be replaced. Please contact us to request a replacement.

For CPAP treatment to be effective, the mask needs to fit correctly. The mask needs to fit tightly enough to your skin that air doesn't leak out, but not so tight that it irritates your skin. It is common to have a red mark on your skin immediately after you have taken off the mask, but it should fade within an hour or so.

It is important that you **do not** apply any creams or oils to your face before putting the mask on, as this can prevent the mask from forming a good seal against your face. We recommend that you put any face creams or oils on right after you wake up in the morning and not too close to when you go to bed.

### The tube

Both ends of the tube are identical. One end will connect to the mask and the other end will connect to the machine. The tube only needs to be replaced if it gets damaged.

During cold weather, we advise keeping as much of the tube underneath your duvet as possible to help warm the air inside. Alternatively, you can wrap the outside of the tube in a layer of fleece fabric.

### What are the most common side effects of CPAP treatment?

CPAP treatment is safe, can be immediately effective and is usually well-tolerated by people. However, as with all treatments, there are some possible side effects.

The most common side effects of CPAP treatment are:

- a dry mouth and nose
- bloating when you wake up
- slight skin irritation and discomfort around the mask

If you experience any of these side effects or any other side effects, please contact us for advice.

### What can I do if I am struggling to adapt to the CPAP treatment?

You may find it strange at first to wear a mask while you sleep. To help you get used to wearing it, we recommend walking around the house for a few hours during the day with the mask on or while you are distracted doing something else, such as watching television. If this doesn't help, please contact us for advice.

It may also take you a little while to get used to breathing while the CPAP machine pushes pressurised air into your airways. This is normal. If you continue to find it difficult, please contact us for advice.

If you wake up in the night and the air pressure feels uncomfortable, either:

- switch the CPAP machine off and take the mask off for a few minutes before turning it back on again **or**
- turn on the 'ramp' feature, if enabled, as this will keep the air pressure set at a lower level for a few minutes to allow you to fall asleep again (we will have shown you how to do this at your clinic appointment).

If you find it difficult to use the CPAP machine all night, try to use it for a few hours each night and then gradually increase how long you use it for until you can use it all night. You can also try using it during the day when you have a nap or while watching television or reading to help you get used to it.

### How do I use the CPAP machine?

We will have shown you how to use the machine and how to attach all the different parts together at your clinic appointment. However, if you are unsure about anything, you will find the manufacturer's instruction booklet in your CPAP equipment bag, which explains how to use the equipment and how to care for it.

The CPAP machine should be placed beside the head of your bed on a solid flat surface (a small bedside table is ideal). Do not place it on carpeted floor, as it may draw in too much dust (regardless of how clean your house is). If possible, try to position the machine at a slightly lower level than your head when lying in bed.

We advise trying out different arrangements of the CPAP machine and tubing until you find what works best for you.

### How do I look after my CPAP treatment equipment?

#### Machine

Wipe the machine on a regular basis with a clean dry cloth to prevent the build-up of dust.

#### Filter

##### If you have a ResMed CPAP machine

Once a week, take the air filter out of the machine and tap it with your fingers to remove any excess dust. **Do not wash the filter.**

##### If you have a Philips Respironics CPAP machine

Once a week, take the air filter out of the machine and wash it in warm soapy water and then allow to air dry.

### **For all filters**

When the filter starts to turn grey and you are unable to remove excess dust from it, contact us for a replacement filter.

### **Tube**

Wash the tube once a week in warm soapy water, then rinse well with clean water and hang it up somewhere to allow it to air dry.

### **Mask and headgear**

Wash the mask thoroughly every morning in warm soapy water and then allow to air dry.

Wash the headgear once a week in warm soapy water. Alternatively, you can put it in the washing machine at 30 degrees. **Do not tumble dry or iron the headgear.**

### **Maintenance**

We will service your CPAP machine every three years to ensure it is still safe for you to use. We will send you an appointment letter in the post when a service is due. If you feel that your machine is not working properly in between these services, please contact us.

## **Who should I contact for replacement CPAP treatment equipment?**

When you need any like-for-like replacement equipment (including masks, filters and tubing), please contact us and we will post these to your home address. Alternatively, you can collect the equipment from our sleep service department, but please make sure you call ahead to let us know what equipment you need.

## **Why do I need a CPAP treatment trial?**

You need a trial of this treatment to get settled with it and see whether it helps improve your symptoms of OSA. The trial stage is often a short period of time

and ends with your first follow-up appointment with us. We will send you an appointment letter containing details about this in the post.

At this appointment, we will review how effective the treatment has been in controlling your OSA and improving your symptoms. Occasionally, we may have to extend the trial period, until we are sure the CPAP treatment is effective.

If you have any concerns or experience any problems during your trial period, please contact us for advice as soon as possible.

## **What will happen after the trial period?**

We will arrange for you to have a face-to-face follow-up appointment every three years (or every year if you are a heavy goods vehicle (HGV) or public service vehicle (PSV) driver) to check that the treatment is still effective.

**Please bring all your CPAP treatment equipment (including the mask) with you to these follow-up appointments.**

If you experience any problems with your CPAP treatment equipment or have any concerns between these follow-up appointments, please contact us for advice.

## **How will I know if the CPAP treatment is effective?**

The CPAP machine will record information about your CPAP usage, including how well the treatment is controlling your OSA and how well the mask is fitting. This information is then stored on a memory card built into the machine. We will download this card at your follow-up appointments and discuss the data with you. Some machines can transfer your CPAP treatment data to us on a daily basis, allowing us to monitor your treatment remotely. Other machines have an app which you can download onto your smartphone, giving you some patient-friendly information on how well the treatment is going. We will have provided you with more information about the app and remote monitoring when we gave you the CPAP treatment equipment, if applicable. Please contact us if you would like to discuss this further.

## Frequently asked questions about long-term CPAP treatment

### How long should I use the CPAP machine for at night?

You should ideally use the CPAP machine all night every night. The longer you use it each night, the more benefit you will get. To ensure you sleep for a long time at night, we recommend avoiding taking naps during the day. If you find it difficult to use the CPAP machine all night every night, please contact us for advice.

### How long will I be on CPAP treatment for?

Most people will need to be on CPAP treatment for the rest of their life. However, if the cause of your OSA is only being overweight, then adopting a healthier and more active lifestyle may improve or treat your condition.

### Are there any risks of being on long-term CPAP treatment?

If your CPAP machine is used and cared for correctly and serviced every three years, there are no risks of being on long-term CPAP treatment.

### What will happen if I stop the CPAP treatment?

Not using your CPAP machine for one or two nights will not cause any harm, but your OSA symptoms are likely to return, especially tiredness and daytime sleepiness. You may have to refrain from driving or operating heavy machinery on the days you do not use your CPAP machine, to prevent accidents from occurring.

### Can I take the CPAP machine on holiday with me?

Yes. Most CPAP machines will work anywhere in the world, as long as you use the correct plug adaptor (if needed, you will need to purchase this yourself).

If you are flying anywhere, you must pack your CPAP treatment equipment in your CPAP bag. You will also need a flight letter from us explaining what CPAP treatment is in order to show the airline company. We can send you this letter via post or email, but please make sure you request the letter as soon as possible before your holiday to allow us enough time to arrange this for you. This letter will be written in English and will not describe how the CPAP treatment works. For this reason, we advise you to also pack the manufacturer's instruction booklet that contains information in multiple languages. This can be found in your CPAP bag.

### What happens if I don't get on well with the CPAP treatment?

We will do our very best to help you adapt to the CPAP treatment. If you have any concerns or problems with the treatment, please contact us as soon as possible so that we can resolve any issues you are experiencing, helping you to continue with the treatment. If despite all efforts, you are unable to tolerate the CPAP treatment, we may be able to discuss alternative treatments with you.

### What happens if I need to stay in hospital overnight?

If you need to stay in hospital overnight, you **must** take your CPAP treatment equipment with you. You will also need to inform the healthcare team looking after you that you are a CPAP treatment user. If you experience any problems, please ask a member of the team caring for you to contact us on telephone: **023 8120 1947** or email: **adultsleepservice@uhs.nhs.uk**

### Can I use CPAP treatment when I have a nap?

Yes. CPAP treatment should be used whenever you are asleep. However, you may find that you nap less often after starting CPAP treatment.

### I am experiencing chest pain and/or breathing problems when awake.

#### Can I rely on CPAP treatment to help me?

No. CPAP treatment is only designed to treat sleep apnoea. Depending on the severity of your symptoms, contact your general practitioner (GP) or NHS **111** for advice, or in an emergency, call **999**.

## Frequently asked questions about OSA, driving and operating heavy machinery

A symptom of untreated OSA is daytime sleepiness. We all know what sleepiness feels like, so we should be able to avoid falling asleep at the wheel or while operating heavy machinery. As a driver, you have a duty and social responsibility to ensure that you are fit to drive.

### What does the law say about OSA and driving?

Excessive sleepiness means that you have had difficulty concentrating and have found yourself falling asleep (for example, while at work, watching television or when driving).

Do not drive if your current level of daytime sleepiness is or is likely to have a negative impact on your ability to drive safely. If this is the case, you must not drive until you're free from excessive sleepiness or until your symptoms are under control and you're strictly following any necessary treatment.

We will discuss this with you and give you more information about notifying the **Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA)** and **your car insurance provider** of your diagnosis. We will also advise you on whether it is safe for you to continue driving while we try to get your sleepiness controlled. Most car insurance providers will be happy to insure you once you have started CPAP treatment.

For more information about excessive sleepiness and driving, please visit: **[www.gov.uk/excessive-sleepiness-and-driving](http://www.gov.uk/excessive-sleepiness-and-driving)**

### **I drive for a living. What does an OSA diagnosis mean for me?**

We understand that some people drive for a living and loss of a driving licence can be a serious problem. For this reason, we aim to successfully treat you for OSA as soon as possible, to prevent you losing your driving licence.

Occasionally, the DVLA may check with us about how you are getting on with the CPAP treatment and if your OSA remains well-controlled (this will be once a year for HGV/PSV licence holders). As long as you continue with the treatment as instructed and it remains effective, we will have no concerns about you holding a driving licence. However, if you fail to attend your follow-up appointments with us, we will be unable to confirm to the DVLA that your OSA is well-controlled and this may then invalidate your car insurance policy, should you be involved in an accident.

### **I know I am sleepy, but I have never had an accident. Why do I need to tell the DVLA?**

When you are sleepy, you are less alert than usual and will react to things slower. Your judgement and vision will also be affected, and you won't be able to concentrate as well. These side effects of sleepiness put you at a higher risk of having a road traffic accident.

### **How do you know if I am telling the truth about how sleepy I am?**

Although we rely on your honesty, we do also offer a range of tests to assess the severity of your sleepiness and the likelihood of it impacting your ability to drive safely. If needed, we can arrange for you to have these tests. The test results will then be used to help us decide on how to proceed regarding the DVLA. We can also check how often you are using your CPAP machine and how effective the treatment is.

### **Can the sleep service notify the DVLA on my behalf?**

Yes we can. Although we have a duty of confidentiality to you and we respect any decision you make about your treatment, we also have a duty to society and must, by law, share information with appropriate services without your consent if the information you share with us suggests:

- you may harm yourself
- a third party may be at risk (justified in the public interest)
- a child is at risk

### **Useful links**

**[www.nhs.uk/conditions/sleep-apnoea](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/sleep-apnoea)**





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