Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP)

The air passages of the nose and throat of some people collapse or become blocked while they are sleeping. This airway collapse causes an obstruction and can cause breathing to stop briefly. When breathing stops for short periods of time, it is known as apnea. Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) is the most common treatment for obstructive sleep apnea. This condition is diagnosed by doing a sleep study.

Different types of CPAP machines are available:

- Mask that cover the nose and mouth
- Mask that covers the nose only called nasal CPAP
- Nasal pillows that slide into the end of the nose

About the CPAP

CPAP is a medical device used to keep the air passages open while you sleep. A small air blower in the CPAP machine pushes air through a flexible tube. The tube attaches to a mask that fits over your nose, or nose and mouth while you sleep. The constant flow of air through the tubing prevents the air passages in your nose and throat from collapsing so your breathing does not stop.
CPAP needs to be used anytime you sleep, both at night or during a nap.

- If the CPAP device is not used or is not used correctly, apnea will return.
- Always take your CPAP with you when traveling or if you are admitted to the hospital.

**Using a CPAP**

Most people find using CPAP helps them feel more rested. You will be fitted for a mask to make sure you get the right seal for air pressure. It may take time for the pressure to be adjusted for your needs, so be patient and work with your doctor. CPAP pressure is lower before you fall asleep and it increases to a higher pressure when sleeping.

- If you wake up during the night, the pressure will be high and it can make it harder to go back to sleep. Some people prefer a bilevel CPAP machine, called a BiPap. The air pressure is different for breathing in than breathing out. Talk to your doctor for help.
- Your mask should not leak air during use. If the mask is uncomfortable, ask if it can be changed or adjusted. Headgear straps may also need to be adjusted.
- Dry skin can make it hard for the mask to get a good seal. Apply moisturizer to the face to see if that helps.
  - Do not use petroleum jelly or Vaseline products as they can break down the mask.
  - Using a humidifier in the room may help to keep the mask sealed.
Side Effects
After a few days of getting used to the CPAP, sleeping should be more restful. If you have any of these signs talk to your doctor:

- Nosebleeds
- Stuffy nose or runny nose
- Chronic dry mouth
- Irritation near the eyes, nose or mouth from how the mask fits

Taking care of the machine

- It is important to clean the machine. Germs left in the CPAP machine can lead to an increased risk of upper respiratory infections.
  
  - Wash mask, tubes, and sponge filters with warm water mixed with small amount of dish soap. Avoid hot water as over time this can break down seals in the masks. Allow time to dry before reuse.
  
  - Change disposable paper CPAP filters as needed.

- Check the mask and tubing for cracks once a month. Replace supplies as needed.

Talk to your doctor, nurse or home care company representative if you have any problems.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.