



Obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA)

Continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) - problems and solutions

CPAP is the most effective treatment if you have moderate to severe OSA. If you have mild OSA, CPAP is only recommended if your symptoms affect your quality of life or other treatment options have not worked.

CPAP is a simple machine that blows air through a mask you wear at night. It's designed to hold your airway open while you're asleep. It sends air at pressure into your upper airway to stop it collapsing or narrowing. Your sleep clinic or the machine itself will set the pressure for you. Before you leave the clinic with your CPAP, it's important to get clear instructions on how to fit the mask, use the machine and keep the equipment clean.

It's vital that you use the CPAP properly or the treatment won't be effective. If you're unsure about anything, ask the sleep clinic or call our helpline on **03000 030 555**.

CPAP problems and solutions

If you're having trouble with your CPAP, try our suggestions. The hope2 sleep website (hope2sleep.co.uk/tips-for-problems-sleeping-with-cpap-or-niv.html) also has tips. If this doesn't help, get in touch with your sleep clinic.

Problem?	Try
I have a nasal mask and air comes out of my mouth at night	<p>Try altering your sleeping position or the number and position of your pillows. If that doesn't work, ask your sleep clinic for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a humidifier to moisten your airway or • a chin strap to help keep your mouth closed or • a full-face mask to cover your nose and mouth
I or my partner find the machine noisy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check if the noise is coming from the mask – it may need re-fitting or re-assembling • Put the machine in a box or cupboard – this is fine as long as there is room for air to circulate • Try wearing earplugs
CPAP treatment is causing a runny nose, blocked nose or sneezing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go to your sleep clinic or your GP to see if there is a medical reason • CPAP's cool air can irritate your nasal lining and give you a runny nose or make you sneeze. This usually settles down after a week or so. If not, try a nasal spray or ask your sleep clinic
I take my mask off in my sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You might be waking up slightly, which may indicate your pressure is not quite high enough. Ask your sleep clinic • Use plasters or surgical tape to stop you taking off the mask until you're used to it
The tubing is irritating me	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tie some string or wool around the tubing and hook it onto the wall above the bed • Put the tubing under your pillow
I wake up feeling uncomfortable with the pressure of the machine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try switching it off and removing the mask for a few minutes. Clear your nose if you need to before putting the mask back and switching on the machine • Try using CPAP during the day for short periods while you are relaxing to help your body adjust • Use the ramp setting to increase the air pressure gradually

Problem?	Try
I find the air too cold and it disrupts my sleep	<p>This can make your nose, mouth or throat feel dry. You could:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • try heating the room • try adding moisture to the room by placing a tray of water above your radiator • try keeping the tube warm – under your bedclothes or your pillow • ask your sleep clinic for a heated humidifier
I am finding it difficult to get a good seal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember to adjust the mask with the machine turned off. Lift the mask off your face, let it settle again and make sure the cushion is not distorted • Try adjusting the straps • Make sure your mask and cushion are not worn or torn • Your mask may not be the right size for you, or you may need a different type – ask your sleep clinic
There is air leaking out of the mask, which irritates my eyes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mask may be too tight. If so, the cushion won't work as well as it should • The mask may be too small or too large • The cushion may need replacing – ask your sleep clinic • The mask may not be fitted correctly – check it's not upside down
I am getting sores where the mask is rubbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bit of tenderness on the bridge of your nose is common when you first start on CPAP • Your mask may be too tight, so try loosening the straps. This could be because the cushion is no longer working and needs replacing, or it could be because the mask is too big for you • Use a cream to ease soreness • Ask your sleep clinic for advice if the soreness remains or gets worse, or if you loosen the straps and get a leak
I have a cold or other infection of my upper airway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your GP if you should continue your treatment • If you do continue, wash everything more often • You may need a full-face mask to help you breathe more easily • Don't worry if you need to stop using CPAP for a night or two. But try to avoid stopping CPAP for more than a few nights

Problem?	Try
My throat feels dry or sore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your sleep clinic for a chin strap or a humidifier • You may find a full-face mask more comfortable
I need to go into hospital for an operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell the surgeon and the anaesthetist you have OSA • Take your treatment with you
I find it hard to breathe	<p>You might take time to get used to breathing out while pressurised air is being pushed in. Once you're asleep, this will happen automatically. Try:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • practising with the machine on during the day while you relax or listen to music • using the ramp feature • using a full-face mask instead of a nasal mask
I am still snoring and stopping breathing in my sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe air is leaking out of the mask – follow our tips on how to get a good seal [link to getting a good seal] • The pressure might need adjusting – ask your clinic
I feel bloated or I have wind	<p>You might take time to adjust to this - keep trying! And:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drink peppermint tea at bedtime and when you get up • relax by lying still and breathing calmly or listening to music • raise your head higher with an extra pillow • you may be swallowing air in response to the pressure. Using a ramp feature can help • ask your sleep clinic for advice – the pressure may need adjusting
I feel claustrophobic wearing the mask	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check you've adjusted the mask correctly so there are no leaks and remember to breathe through your nose if you have a nasal mask. Sometimes, air rushing out of your mouth can make you panic • Try taking a few deep breaths in and out of your nose • Try to keep the mask on for a few hours every night and gradually increase the length of time you wear it • If you're using a full-face mask, switch to a nasal mask

Further information and support

Books

A monkey, a mouse and a CPAP machine: At home with Rufus the chatty chimp. Marion Maz Mason and Steve B Mason

This children's book is written for families to explain how a CPAP machine and mask help someone living with OSA to sleep soundly.

CPAP and ventilator secrets. Marion Maz Mason with Steve B Mason, foreword by Dr John Shneerson MA DM FRCP

You can get both titles from hope2sleep.co.uk or by calling **0300 102 9711**.

Get in touch with us to find support near you.

Helpline: 03000 030 555

Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Ringling our helpline never costs more than a local call and is usually free, even from a mobile.

helpline@blf.org.uk

blf.org.uk

British Lung Foundation
73-75 Goswell Road
London EC1V 7ER

Registered charity in England and Wales (326730), Scotland (038415) and the Isle of Man (1177)



Code: BK32

Version: V3

Last medically reviewed: January 2019

Due for medical review: November 2021

We value feedback on our information. To let us know your views, and for the most up to date version of this information and references, call the helpline or visit **blf.org.uk**