

# CPAP Survival Guide



**THORACIC &  
SLEEP GROUP**  
QUEENSLAND



Accredited for compliance with  
ASA Standard for Sleep Disorders Services

People caring for how you **breathe** and **sleep**.

IN THIS BOOKLET  
YOU WILL FIND  
PLENTY OF USEFUL  
INFORMATION  
THAT WILL HELP  
YOU PROGRESS  
SMOOTHLY  
THROUGH THE  
INITIAL STAGES  
YOUR CPAP THERAPY.

Beginning on CPAP  
can sometimes be a  
challenging adjustment  
however it does get  
easier and you will  
soon enjoy the benefits  
of better sleep.

The important thing  
to know is that initial  
obstacles are **NORMAL,**  
**COMMON & FIXABLE.**

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## Get Plenty of Support

The support of your wife/husband/bed partner/friend is vital for therapy success.

Ask around - Most people are interested to find they already know someone who is on CPAP therapy. By talking to others who are going through treatments themselves, you will discover new approaches that will help you overcome the challenges of CPAP therapy and be encouraged by their success.

Your CPAP machine manual is also a great resource for you.

Don't forget, we are here for you. This booklet goes through the most common problems people have when they first start CPAP treatment. If you have any further questions, don't hesitate to contact our trained CPAP staff.

## Feeling Anxious

It is normal to feel quite anxious for the first few nights of using your CPAP machine.

Using the "Ramp" or Settling" feature anytime you are awake will help with getting used to CPAP over the initial period.

If CPAP therapy keeps you tossing and turning, try getting up and out of your bed and come back only when you are feeling tired.

A great way to alleviate anxiety is to use the CPAP machine while watching TV or reading a book. This takes the focus away from the therapy and allows you to breathe more naturally with the machine.

## Too Much Air

Some people feel like they are receiving too much air in their initial CPAP use. Try to relax as this will slow down your breathing rate and allow you to breathe more deeply.

Note that you are filling your lungs with air and exercising them by breathing against "positive pressure." This sensation will feel strange at first but will soon feel normal - and your lungs will appreciate all the air they are getting too.

*Like most things, the hardest part about CPAP therapy is getting started*



## Swallowing Air

If you feel like you are swallowing air, try to relax and the symptoms will soon disappear. This is a common initial side effect while you are getting used to your machine.

It takes time for the soft palate to settle, especially if you were a severe snorer. Using the “Ramp” or “Settling” feature whenever you are awake will help with this as well. If you notice that you are breathing through your mouth during the night, you may find that a chinstrap is helpful.

## Dry Mouth, Dry Throat or Nasal Congestion

Nasal stuffiness and congestion is the most common side effect of CPAP therapy. Using the humidity output on the machine is vital for the health of your airway.

If you are using a nasal mask, make sure your mouth is closed during sleep. Even if you are using a full-face mask, it is better to breathe through your nose than your mouth if possible. This helps with dryness of the airway and reduces the amount of swallowed air.

Also remember to drink plenty of water during the day.

If symptoms persist, you can talk to your doctor about nasal decongestants or Nozoil.

## Humidity - How much do you need?

The amount of humidity you use varies for everybody, depending on the following factors:

- Weather- Summer/winter
- Age and weight
- Hydration (drink lots of water)
- Machine type/Mask type
- Medications (many dry out your mouth)
- Air-conditioning (which tends to dry out the air)
- Cold and flu or sinus issues (generally you need more humidity if you have a cold)

## Headaches

If you are getting headaches, make sure the head straps of your mask are not too tight. This is the most common reason for headaches.

## Removing the mask in your sleep

If you are involuntarily removing the mask in your sleep, try increasing the humidity.

Your nose and throat may be irritated by dry air and you may be subconsciously removing the mask to try to alleviate the problem.

Also make sure the mask is not leaking around the eyes and that it is not too tight.

## Only sleeping for short periods

If you are not getting a full night's sleep at the start of your therapy, relax! This is normal. As you get used to the therapy your sleep time will increase. Go to bed only when you are tired and rise immediately after you wake. Make sure you have adequate humidity as this will lead to undisturbed sleep and allow you to wake refreshed and rejuvenated.

*If you experience ongoing headaches talk to your doctor*

## Mask Leakages

All masks are likely to leak at some stage during sleep. If it is only a small leak, you can go back to sleep without anything being affected. If you find that the leak is really bothering you, lift the mask off your face and place it back. This allows the mask cushion to inflate and give a better seal. Repeat this if necessary – it will often fix a leak.

Only adjust the straps if **absolutely necessary**. Do not over tighten the straps as this will only make matters worse by crushing the cushions. Make sure the mask has been assembled correctly - particularly the silicone seal. If this is not assembled properly, a large leak will occur.

## Water In The Mask or Mask Whistling

Water in your mask or your mask is whistling is fine as this means that you are getting plenty of humidification. If there is too much water though, there are a number of things that you can do.

If the air temperature is cold (air conditioning, winter nights) and the humidity setting is too high, condensation can occur. Make your bedroom warmer or reduce the heat on your humidifier to balance the ambient and tubing temperature. Using a tube cosy or putting the tube under the blankets can also be effective.

*It is about finding a happy medium.*

## Sore face, Red Marks or Pressure Sores

If you are experiencing this, chances are that your mask is probably too tight. Small mask leaks are not detrimental to your sleep so you do not have to over tighten the straps. Loosen the mask straps and refit the mask to allow air to fill the cushion.

Most masks also have a forehead adjustment that can be changed to take the pressure off the bridge of the nose.

*A mask that is too tight will leak more!*

## Red or Dry eyes

If you have red or dry eyes as a result of your CPAP machine, your mask may have an excessive leak around the eyes. Try repositioning the mask while the CPAP machine is on. If your mask has a forehead adjustment, this can be changed to position the mask closer to the eyes and eliminate any leaks.

If you find that you are having trouble positioning it correctly, call and book an appointment to see your CPAP consultant for another fitting.

## Where do I place my CPAP machine?

The best place for your CPAP machine is on a bedside table or stool as the off/on button needs to be easily reached. Don't place it above your head or on the ground as it will pick up excess dust, however some people place the tubing over the bed head and secure it with a scarf or tie. This allows you to move freely without the tubing interrupting your sleep. This may not work for everyone so find what is best for you.



## Machine Making Gurgling Noises

If your machine is making gurgling noises, you may be opening your mouth during sleep causing the air to go through your nose and escape out of your mouth. You may need more humidity which encourages mouth closure. You may also like to try a chinstrap which encourages your mouth to stay closed at night.

## Feeling Claustrophobic

If you are feeling claustrophobic while wearing the mask, try to get used to it while you are awake by wearing the mask while watching TV or reading a book. This will often distract you from feelings of claustrophobia. You may also like to try putting the mask on for only a few minutes to start and then work your way up to a full night.

## When everything else fails

Fill in a CPAP survival diary - tracking progress, problems and triumphs.

Once you have completed your diary, call your CPAP consultant and if needed we will book you in for a free consultation. Speaking to others who are also on CPAP is a great source of comfort and information.

*You are not alone.*

*Most people experience exactly the same things when starting CPAP.*



## CPAP CLEANING CHECK LIST

### *Daily*

- ☐ *Empty, and replace the water out of the humidifier tank*
- ☐ *Wiping the mask with a damp, fabric cloth (not antibacterial wipes) to remove excess oil*

### *Weekly*

- ☐ *Cleaning all mask components (including headgear) in warm soapy water (mild detergent eg, dishwashing liquid) and leaving to dry out of direct sunlight.*
- ☐ *Rinsing CPAP tube with water (preferably filtered or distilled water)*

## CPAP MAINTENANCE CHECK LIST

### *Yearly*

- ☐ *Had your machine data checked in the last 6-12months*
- ☐ *Looked at your mask integrity and elasticity of straps to see any holes, mould, rips or heard any strange noises*

### *Monthly*

- ☐ *Checked your filters in the last 3-6 months*
- ☐ *Monitored calcium build up in the humidifier*

### *Weekly*

- ☐ *Rinsed the CPAP tubing in warm soapy water*
- ☐ *Disassembled your mask components, washed it and the head strapping in warm soapy water (only one drop of detergent) thoroughly rinsed in clean water and allowed to dry out of direct sunlight*





**Take** control of  
your sleep

**Take** control of  
your health

**Take** advantage  
of your CPAP  
Consultant's expertise

**Ask** for help

