

The Penn Sleep Centers

Obstructive Sleep Apnea Education (Page 1)

A good place to learn about obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) and continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) therapy is the American Academy of Sleep Medicine's website, www.sleepeducation.com. Here are two articles to get you started:

Obstructive Sleep Apnea: <http://www.sleepeducation.com/Disorder.aspx?id=7>

The Basics of CPAP: <http://www.sleepeducation.com/CPAPCentral/CPAPBasics.aspx>

Frequently Asked Questions

How often do I need to use CPAP?

CPAP works best when used with all sleep, including naps. CPAP therapy only works while you are actively using it; it cannot prevent breathing pauses from happening in the future. As a result, it is important not to skip any nights on CPAP and to use CPAP for the entire time you are asleep.

Do I need to use CPAP when I travel?

Yes, it is important to bring CPAP with you when you travel. If you travel outside of the United States, you may need an electrical adapter. If you travel to an unusually high altitude for a period of time, your CPAP pressure may need a temporary adjustment. When flying, you should take your CPAP unit as a carry-on item, but it should not count towards your carry-on allotment. Airport security personnel should be familiar with CPAP equipment.

Should I use CPAP when I am sick?

In almost all cases, you can — and should — keep using CPAP when you are sick. If you have a nasal or nasal pillow mask and are having trouble breathing through your nose due to a cold or allergies, you may need to switch to a full face mask until you are better. Talk to your Sleep doctor or primary care provider to see if you can take a decongestant or another type of medication to improve your nasal symptoms. Once you are well again, make sure to clean all of your CPAP equipment in a diluted vinegar solution to kill any remaining germs.

Will I have to use CPAP forever?

Most people prescribed CPAP therapy for obstructive sleep apnea will need to use CPAP for the rest of their lives. However, some people who have lost a lot of weight, such as through bariatric surgery, may no longer need CPAP. Other people may no longer need CPAP after having surgery on their upper airway. In these cases, a sleep study is performed to make sure CPAP is no longer needed. Please talk to your Sleep doctor if you think you may no longer need CPAP.



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What will happen if I do not treat my obstructive sleep apnea?

Obstructive sleep apnea involves breathing pauses in your sleep. These pauses can last from 10 seconds to a minute or even longer. Someone with OSA can have hundreds of these breathing pauses each night. These breathing pauses can cause dramatic changes in your blood pressure and oxygen levels while you sleep, placing a lot of stress on your body. Over time, if left untreated, obstructive sleep apnea can increase your risk for a number of serious health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and obesity.

The good news is that OSA can be treated with a high rate of success. CPAP therapy has been shown to be a very effective treatment for OSA.

Source: Eight Health Risks of OSA. 2008. Retrieved July 14, 2009 from www.sleepeducation.com

Are there alternative treatments to CPAP therapy?

CPAP therapy is often the best treatment for obstructive sleep apnea. However, there are some alternative treatments, including weight loss, positional therapy, oral appliances and upper airway surgery. If you are interested in any of these alternative treatments, please tell your Sleep doctor.

I no longer want to use CPAP. What do I do?

Your Sleep doctor has prescribed CPAP therapy as a treatment for your obstructive sleep apnea, just as they might prescribe a medication for high blood pressure or other medical problem. Failing to treat OSA can lead to serious health problems. Before you stop CPAP, you need to talk with your Sleep doctor about your problems with CPAP and discuss alternative treatments, if appropriate. CPAP units cannot be returned to the Penn Sleep Center under any circumstances. In addition, you cannot return your CPAP unit to your home care company without an order from your Sleep doctor. In some cases, your doctor may ask you to sign a document stating that you understand you are stopping CPAP against medical advice. The first step is to make an appointment with your Sleep doctor by calling the [Penn Sleep Center](http://PennSleepCenter.org) at 215.662.7772.

