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The Sleep Doctor independently selects the products we test. We may earn a commission if you make a purchase using the links on our site. Learn more. The most common risk factor for OSA is obesity, which accounts for roughly 60% of moderate to severe OSA diagnoses. Sleeping on your back can exacerbate the condition, as this allows the tongue to fall back into the throat and further obstruct breathing. Consuming alcohol before bed can also worsen OSA symptoms, since it can cause the throat muscles to relax. Other common causes of OSA include:Facial irregularities: OSA can occur when someone has a large tongue, an irregular shape on the roof of their mouth, or a disproportionately small lower jaw compared with their upper jaw.Large neck: A collar size of at least 17 inches for men and 16 inches for women has been linked to OSA.Enlarged tonsils or adenoids: This is a leading cause of OSA in children. Both the tonsils and adenoids can be surgically removed.Roughly 4% of men and 2% of women in the U.S. meet the diagnostic criteria for OSA. About 1% to 5% of children have OSA. The prevalence of the condition increases with age.CPAP therapy is sometimes prescribed for people with central sleep apnea (CSA), a condition that occurs when the brain is unable to send signals to muscles that regulate breathing. However, the effectiveness of CPAP for treating this type of sleep apnea has not been proven.How Does CPAP Therapy Work?A doctor's prescription is required to purchase the machine and face mask, but anyone can obtain the hose and other CPAP accessories. Following a sleep apnea diagnosis, your doctor will prescribe an air pressure level based on the severity of your symptoms.The CPAP machine features a fan that draws in air and a filter to separate contaminants. Some machines also feature humidifiers to provide extra moisture when delivering air through the hose. Humidifiers can alleviate some of the uncomfortable side effects of CPAP therapy, such as dry mouth and sore throat, but this component is not required.Before turning on the CPAP machine, check to see if the hose is properly connected to both the machine and your face mask. Also, make sure the mask is secure. Most CPAP masks have elastic straps that allow comfortable fitting regardless of your head's size or shape. People with sleep apnea should use their CPAP equipment whenever they sleep. This includes not only in-home use each night, but also for napping or while traveling.Adjusting to CPAP therapy can be challenging. Most doctors caution that the first few nights of using a CPAP machine can result in poor sleep. If you experience ongoing discomfort, this may necessitate a change to your CPAP prescription. The pressure level settings on a CPAP machine cannot be manually changed. After your doctor has updated the prescription, you will need to arrange for the machine's manufacturer to adjust the settings.CPAP Cleaning GuidelinesRegular maintenance is essential for keeping the equipment hygienic. If you use CPAP therapy, you'll need to do the following:Clean the mask and tubing every day. Most hoses can be washed in warm, soapy water. The mask should be disassembled, and each part should be washed separately with mild soap. Air-dry these components and make sure they are moisture-free before reassembling them.If your machine includes a humidifier, sanitize it using a solution of warm water and white vinegar. The humidifier should soak for several minutes.Clean or replace the air filter as needed. Disposable filters need to be replaced every couple of weeks, while reusable filters should be cleaned on a weekly or biweekly basis and replaced every three months or so.These guidelines apply to most CPAP equipment sold today. Be sure to check the owner's manual for specific cleaning instructions before using your CPAP machine for the first time.Some companies sell devices designed to clean CPAP machines using ozone gas or ultraviolet light. However, the Food and Drug Administration has issued a warning about these devices. People who have used these types of CPAP cleaners report asthma attacks, headaches, and breathing problems. These devices are not approved by the FDA.Types of CPAP MasksCPAP masks are sold separately from CPAP machines. Like the machines, CPAP masks require a prescription. Your doctor can recommend which type of mask is best based on your sleep apnea symptoms. The most common types of masks are listed in detail below. When you have sleep apnea, your upper airway gets blocked during your sleep. This can lead to fatigue, heart problems, high blood pressure, and other serious health problems. A continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machine -- a device that delivers air pressure through a mask while you sleep -- is the most common treatment for sleep apnea. With it, your airways can stay open and your body can get more oxygen to help it work well.With all the options available, it may feel overwhelming to choose the right machine for you. Together with your doctor and these tips, you can find the one that'll give you what you need.1. Start with an expert. You can find a lot of information about the "best" kind of CPAP machines on your own, but only your doctor can really figure out what's going to work for you. "A CPAP machine is medical equipment, so your doctor should be the one to make a recommendation for you," says Matthew Ebben, PhD, a sleep specialist at Weill Cornell Medicine. You need a prescription to get a CPAP machine, so a primary care provider, pulmonologist, or sleep specialist who can review your sleep studies should be your first stop."Think of it like getting glasses," Ebben says. "You wouldn't go to your eye doc and just tell them you think you want bifocals. They'll test your eyes first and see what kind of lens is best for you. The same is true for a PAP machine."2. Prioritize fit.Your CPAP mask connects the machine to your airways. Masks come in different sizes. In order for your machine to do its job, the mask needs to fit properly."Fit can make a big difference in both comfort and in leakage," says Ajay Sampat, MD, an assistant clinical professor in the Division of Sleep Medicine at UC Davis Health.A mask that's too big, he says, can leak around its sides and up into your eyes. This could make it less comfortable, so you'd be less likely to keep using it. Sampat says a sleep technician, sleep technologist, or respiratory technologist can work with you directly to fit you to the right mask.3. Consider comfort.Size is only one part of fit. You also want to think about the type of mask that will work best with your features."I'm seeing someone in my clinic, I look for certain things to help determine what they need," Sampat says. "I look at their facial features: Do they have a beard? Do they have a large chin? What kind of nose structure do they have?"Another key piece of mask choice is whether you breathe through your nose, your mouth, or both at night."If someone breathes through their mouth only, for example, then choosing a mask that doesn't cover the mouth is probably not going to be as effective," Sampat says.4. Explore accessories.CPAP machines not only come with masks, tubing, and filters, they also have add-ons you can get to make your machine more comfortable and easier to use. "Sometimes, people have trouble with the hose getting tangled up during the night, and so they use a hose hanger attached to their headboard to help keep it out of the way," Ebben says.There's a whole range of "extras" that can enhance your experience. For example, pads can help soften the feel of the straps, and heated hoses can moisten the air as it enters your nose.Not all accessories will fit all machines and masks, so be sure you know what will work with yours.5. Research who will repair it.Your machine may have issues from time to time, so it's good to know where you'll turn for a fix."If your machine is malfunctioning, the ability to replace or speak with a real person to troubleshoot is key," says Chidima Chima-Melton, MD, medical director for quality specialty care and regional medical director for pulmonary at UCLA Health.6. Check your coverage.Most private health insurance policies cover CPAP machines and equipment like tubing, filters, masks, and headgear. The level of coverage will depend on your specific plan. Your plan may require you to rent your machine instead of buying one. If you have a high-deductible plan, you may have to pay a lot right away for your machine. In this case, you might find that paying for it yourself without using your insurance -- the "self-pay" option -- is cheaper.Be sure to check with your insurance company to learn about your options."Most medical insurance companies use durable medical equipment [DME] middleman to support the machines," Chima-Melton says. "They're not all the same -- some provide more responsiveness and support than others. It's important to be aware of who insurance works with and what machines they have in stock."7. Think through the details.Some machines are louder than others. Some take up more space than others. Consider how the machine you choose will work with your lifestyle."If you're someone who is frequently on the road, you may want a smaller CPAP machine than someone who doesn't travel," Chima-Melton says.8. Be patient.It's not unusual to cycle through a few different masks before you find the right one for you, Ebben says. And even then, you should give a mask a chance before moving on to another. "It's kind of like shoes," he says. "They might feel pretty good on your feet at the shoe store, but after you walk a few blocks, they might start rubbing your foot in one spot. It may take a breaking-in period before you're fully comfortable."Using a CPAP for the first time is also a whole new experience in general, so give yourself time to adjust."Going from not using a CPAP to sleeping with one can be scary and takes some getting used to," Chima-Melton says. "However, the vast majority of people do, and actually love their CPAP once they're finally getting quality sleep." © 2021 WebMD, LLC. All rights reserved. View privacy policy and trust info

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