

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP)

WHAT IS CPAP?

The most common and effective nonsurgical treatment for sleep apnea is Continuous Positive Airway Pressure or CPAP which is applied through a nasal or facial mask while you sleep. The CPAP device does not breathe for you. Instead, it creates a flow of air pressure when you inhale that is strong enough to keep your airway passages open. Once your otolaryngologist determines that CPAP is the right treatment, you will need to wear the CPAP mask every night.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU NEED CPAP?

When evaluating sleep apnea, your otolaryngologist may ask the following questions:

- Does your snoring disturb your family and friends?
- Do you have daytime sleepiness?
- Do you wake frequently throughout the night?
- Have you had episodes of obstructed breathing during sleep?
- Do you have morning headaches or tiredness?

After a review of your medical history and an examination of your airway, your otolaryngologist will order an overnight sleep study. A CPAP recommendation is made after your otolaryngologist reviews the results of the study.

HOW DO YOU GET CPAP?

If your otolaryngologist recommends CPAP, you may be scheduled for a second sleep study during which you will be fitted for a mask and CPAP device. The level of air pressure will be adjusted during the study to eliminate the airway obstruction. Alternatively, you may be placed on a self-adjusting CPAP machine which will determine the pressure needed to keep the airway open.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF CPAP?

CPAP is the most effective means of treating snoring and sleep apnea. It keeps airway passages open which prevents pauses in breathing and helps you to get better sleep. This, in turn, reduces daytime sleepiness, fatigue and other sleep apnea related health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, and stroke.

WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES OF CPAP?

The CPAP device needs to be used every night. Some patients complain of mask discomfort, nasal congestion, and nose and throat dryness when using CPAP. Others find the device to be too

constrictive and cumbersome, particularly when traveling. Unfortunately, these complaints sometimes lead to inconsistent use or abandonment of the device altogether. Proper mask fitting and use of a humidifier can resolve these issues.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR SLEEP APNEA?

Lifestyle change including weight loss and exercise can help to improve sleep apnea and its related health problems. Sleep positioning and oral appliances have also been found to be effective. In cases when non-invasive treatments fail, a surgical solution might be necessary. Your otolaryngologist will be able to advise you on the treatment options.