CPAP and BIPAP

CPAP and BIPAP are methods of helping you breathe. CPAP stands for "continuous positive airway pressure." BIPAP stands for "bi-level positive airway pressure." Both CPAP and BIPAP are provided by a small machine with a flexible plastic tube that attaches to a plastic mask that goes over your nose or mouth. Air is blown into your air passages through your nose or mouth. This helps to keep your airways open and helps to keep you breathing well.

The amount of pressure that is used to blow the air into your air passages can be set on the machine. The pressure setting is based on your needs. With CPAP, the amount of pressure stays the same while you breathe in and out. With BIPAP, the amount of pressure changes when you inhale and exhale. Your caregiver will recommend whether CPAP or BIPAP would be more helpful for you.

CPAP and BIPAP can be helpful for both adults and children with:

- Sleep apnea.
- Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), a condition like emphysema.
- Diseases which weaken the muscles of the chest such as muscular dystrophy or neurological diseases.
- Other problems that cause breathing to be weak or difficult.

USE OF CPAP OR BIPAP

The respiratory therapist or technician will help you get used to wearing the mask. Some people feel *claustrophobic* (a trapped or closed in feeling) at first, because the mask needs to be fairly snug on your face.

- It may help you to get used to the mask gradually, by first holding the mask loosely over your nose or mouth using a low pressure setting on the machine. Gradually the mask can be applied more snugly with increased pressure. You can also gradually increase the amount of time the mask is used.
- People with sleep apnea will use the mask and machine at night when they are sleeping. Others, like those with ALS or other breathing difficulties, may need the CPAP or BIPAP all the time.
- If the first mask you try does not fit well, or is uncomfortable, there are other types and sizes that can be tried.
- If you tend to breathe through your mouth, a chin strap may be applied to help keep your mouth closed (if you are using a nasal mask).
- The CPAP and BIPAP machines have alarms that may sound if the mask comes off or develops a leak.
- You should not eat or drink while the CPAP or BIPAP is on. Food or fluids could get pushed into your lungs by the pressure of the CPAP or BIPAP.

Sometimes CPAP or BIPAP machines are ordered for home use. If you are going to use the CPAP or BIPAP machine at home, follow these instructions

- CPAP or BIPAP machines can be rented or purchased through home health care companies. There are many different brands of machines available. If you rent a machine before purchasing you may find which particular machine works well for you.
- Ask questions if there is something you do not understand when picking out your machine.
- Place your CPAP or BIPAP machine on a secure table or stand near an electrical outlet.
- Know where the On/Off switch is.
- Follow your doctor's instructions for how to set the pressure on your machine and when you should use it.
- Do not smoke! Tobacco smoke residue can damage the machine.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have redness or open areas around your nose or mouth.
- You have trouble operating the CPAP or BIPAP machine.
- You cannot tolerate wearing the CPAP or BIPAP mask.
- You have any questions or concerns.

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