



# Getting Used to CPAP with claustrophobia

## A Northern Nights Sleep Disorder Centre Patient Guide

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This step by step guide will help you get used to wearing CPAP even if you have trouble having something over your face. Almost everyone can sleep wearing CPAP if they start at the beginning and take each step patiently.

### Read each step over before you try it.

**Step 1.** Sit down with your CPAP mask in a comfortable chair in the living room by yourself. Hold the CPAP mask up to your face *without any* straps or hose attached – just use the mask by itself. Breathe quietly and comfortably through the mask. Take the mask away if you get anxious or uncomfortable.

Distract yourself with television, radio, or by reading.

Start by holding it on for just a few breaths and then gradually increase the length of time you use the mask. When you are comfortable breathing through the mask for 20-30 minutes, you are ready for the next step.

**Step 2.** Put the mask on using the straps. Don't make them too tight, just snug enough to keep the mask in place.

Breathe quietly and comfortably. Distract yourself with television, radio, or reading. Take the mask off if you get anxious or uncomfortable.

Gradually increase the length of time you use the mask. When you are comfortable breathing through the mask for 15-20 minutes, you are ready for the next step.

**Step 3.** Bring the CPAP machine into the living room and set it up beside a comfortable chair. The CPAP system can be set up to "ramp" from a low pressure up to the pressure you need to keep your airway open. The ramp settings were adjusted when you got the machine. CPAP can be set to ramp from ~4 cm of water pressure (the lowest setting), but can start at a higher pressure if you don't feel like you are getting enough air at 4 cm. If the setting doesn't seem right for you, check the manual about how to change them, or talk to the vendor. Don't do this step if the ramp/ pressure feels wrong to you. Get it corrected first.

Put some water in the CPAP humidifier. Attach the mask to the CPAP system, and turn it on. It may seem like it is blowing very hard, but that it will settle as soon as you hold the mask to your face so the pressure can't leak. Hold the mask to your face without using the straps. Hold it *just snugly enough* to your face so that it doesn't leak. Remember that CPAP is air under a little bit of pressure, so if you open your mouth to talk or to try and breathe in through your mouth when you have the CPAP on, air will leak out your mouth. *If you have to breathe through your mouth or talk*, hold the mask away from your face.

Take a very deep breath: breathe in, in, in, in *steadily and smoothly*– breathe in until you can't take in any more air.

*Pause* for a few seconds, then breathe out *firmly and as quickly as you can*.

Now *pause again* for a few seconds.

*Repeat 4 or 5 times* following in the same pattern, but *breathe slowly* or you will get dizzy.

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Take the mask off and turn off the machine. Dump the water out of the humidifier. If this has gone well, you are ready to go to step 5.

Some people go on to the next step right away, but I suggest taking a break for at least a few minutes.

**Step 4.** Still in the living room, set up CPAP system. Put water in the humidifier.

Start the system. Put the mask on *this time using the straps*, and do the same slow breathing exercise 4-5 times slowly, and *then leave the mask on*.

Do something distracting such as television, radio, or reading.

When you are comfortable breathing through the mask for ~30 minutes , you are ready for the next step.

**Step 5.** Attach the mask to the CPAP system, start the system, and strap the mask on. You can do the breathing exercise if it helps you feel comfortable, but it isn't essential.

Do something distracting such as television, radio or reading for 5 – 10 minutes.

If you are very comfortable, close your eyes and lie back in your chair, and just relax. Let yourself fall asleep if you are drowsy.

When you are comfortable relaxing on CPAP like this, you are ready to go to bed with CPAP.

**Step 6.** Get ready for bed, make sure you have water in the CPAP humidifier. Go to bed when you feel drowsy, put on the mask, start the pressure and do the breathing exercise.

Let sleep happen. If you can't fall asleep don't stay in bed awake trying harder. If you can't fall asleep get up and do something to distract yourself until you are very sleepy, and then come to bed and try again. Restart the pressure 'ramp' as often as necessary.

**Trouble?** The commonest trouble is to get to step 6 and then have trouble falling asleep in bed with the CPAP. Go back to step 5 for a while. Call and let us know you are having trouble. We usually suggest you add a nonaddictive, mild sedative every night for several weeks at to help you fall asleep in bed with CPAP.

If you are having trouble at any step, go back one step and take more time. Let us know you are having trouble, and make a followup appointment.

Don't rush. Don't worry if you need a lot of time at each step. Be patient, but be persistent.

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