

# Getting Comfortable With CPAP

## A STEP-BY-STEP DESENSITIZATION GUIDE

CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) treats sleep apnea by keeping your airway open while you sleep. It works best when used nightly. It is not uncommon to need time to adjust to using it. Undertaking a desensitization process can help your body and brain get used to CPAP.

### General Tips Before You Start

- Practice when you are **awake**, calm, and not too sleepy
- Go **at your own pace** through the steps
- Short, frequent practice sessions (*5–15 min*) are better than one long one
- Remember: this is helping you breathe better to improve your sleep and health

## Step-by-Step CPAP Desensitization Plan

### Step 1: Get to Know the Mask

**Goal: The mask feels familiar on your face.**

1. Hold the mask, look at it, touch it
2. Place it gently on your face **without** straps, just for a minute
3. Then add the straps loosely and sit with it on for **5–10 minutes** whilst watching TV, reading a book or listening to a podcast

Do this once or twice a day until it feels less strange.

### Step 2: Wear the Mask With the Machine Off

**Goal: The mask and straps feel comfortable.**

1. Put on the mask properly with the straps adjusted gently
2. Sit or lie in bed with the mask on for **10–20 minutes**
3. Practice slow breathing: inhale through the nose for **4 sec**, exhale through the nose for **6 sec**

Do this **daily** until you can relax while wearing the mask.

### Step 3: Turn On the Machine While Awake (*Sitting Up*)

#### Goal: Get used to feeling the air.

1. Put on the mask **before** you feel too sleepy
2. Turn on the machine and do your **wind-down routine** (*reading, relaxation*)
3. If you wake and feel overwhelmed, take 3–5 slow breaths, and remind yourself you are safe. If required, remove the mask and try again later, or the following night.

Gradually increase time with CPAP from **part of the night** to **most/all of the night**.

Aim to wear for >4 hours per night.

If after around a week of practice, you're still very uncomfortable, bring your notes and questions to your sleep team—they can adjust the plan, mask, or settings to help you succeed.

### Quick Trouble-Shooting

#### Feels like “too much air” or “not enough air”

Call your equipment provider or sleep clinic to review pressure and ramp settings

#### Mask hurts or leaks

The straps may be too tight. Ask for a fitting check; you may need a different size or style

#### Feeling panicky/claustrophobic

Go back one step (*e.g., mask with machine off*) and build up slowly with short (*2–5 minute*) sessions

#### Remember:

Take small, regular steps towards your goals.

### Still having trouble?

WSCN offers a free, friendly, and easily accessible Peer Mentorship Program for new CPAP users. Our mentors offer tips, guidance, and support to help you succeed with your new CPAP machine. You can find out more by scanning the QR code, or by visiting:

<https://www.sleephealth.org/wscn/awake-peer-mentor-program/>

