

# Using CPAP with Your Teenager or Young Adult (13 to 21 Years)

Getting started with continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP)



Sleep is an important part of staying healthy for children of all ages. About 3% of children have a sleep disturbance called obstructive sleep apnea. If your teenager or young adult has been prescribed a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) machine while sleeping, this handout offers tips to help you and your child adjust to it.

It's your job to help your child use CPAP during sleep. CPAP helps your child wake up rested and function well throughout the day. Using CPAP can become a normal part of your child's sleep routine and help keep your child healthy.

## **How is my teenager or young adult growing and developing?**

During the teen years, your child becomes more influenced by friends and peers than family members. Teenagers go through puberty and develop their own personal identity. Teens also begin to think hypothetically and can understand multiple perspectives. At this stage of growth, children work to establish some independence from their parents, but also continue to rely upon them for support and resources.

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Teens want more privacy and wish to be treated as an adult. It is important to take time to get to know your teenager as an individual. Maintain as positive and trusting a relationship as possible without trying to be your teen's best friend. You are still the parent and can set appropriate rules and consequences.

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### What might happen

### Tips for CPAP use

**Your teenager or young adult might refuse to put on the mask, may unplug the machine, or take off the mask once you leave the room.**

- After your child is prescribed CPAP, take time to talk with them about their diagnosis and treatment. Talk about CPAP in a way that helps make it a normal part of life. If your teen can explain why CPAP has been prescribed, what CPAP does and why using CPAP is important to staying healthy, it demonstrates understanding and will help your teen adjust to using CPAP. Encourage your teenager to share feelings or concerns about using CPAP. Invite questions, either directed to you or to your child's sleep specialist.
- If you have an aggressive or rebellious teen, try to offer alternatives to aggression, such as sports or extra-curricular activities. Also encourage your teen to take some quiet time for reading, writing or meditation. Your teen may benefit from doing simple relaxation or breathing exercises before bedtime or throughout the day. Set clear standards for behavior.

**Your teenager may be embarrassed about being "different" or feel like they are "the only one." Your teen may not want you to talk about CPAP to anyone or talk about CPAP outside the home.**

- Encourage your teenager to attend a CPAP support group to talk with other teens using CPAP.
- If needed, talk with your teen to create healthy boundaries about who you need to talk with about CPAP and why it is important for them to know about it. If you agree not to talk about CPAP with certain people, honor that agreement. If you need to renegotiate your agreement, let your teen know.

**What might happen**

**Tips for CPAP use**

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**Your teenager may refuse to bring the CPAP machine and mask on vacation, retreats or other overnight trips.**

- Ask your sleep specialist if skipping 1 or 2 days is OK for these special occasions.

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**It is often difficult for caregivers to monitor and enforce CPAP use because of a teenager's increasing need for independence and privacy.**

- Teach your teen that using CPAP is part of a growing independence and taking on adult responsibilities.
- Let your teen take an active role in CPAP treatment. Teach them how to clean the mask, check the filters and read the display screen on the machine.
- Incorporate CPAP-related tasks into your teen's routine responsibilities. Your child's responsibilities may include cleaning their bedroom, washing the dishes, taking out the trash, and cleaning their CPAP mask every day. Avoid fighting or getting into a power struggle with your teen over wearing the mask. Make using CPAP a fun, normal and accepted part of life.
- Work with your teenager to agree on a bedtime. Help your teen learn to prioritize extracurricular activities, family commitments, homework and social time so that bedtime is at a consistent hour each night and to promote a lifetime of healthy sleep habits.

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**Your teenager or young adult may make up excuses to avoid wearing the CPAP mask or lie about using it.**

- To help monitor your teen's CPAP use, the machine will track hours of use. It can distinguish between the hours it is turned on and the hours the mask has been worn.
  - Talk with your teen about the importance of CPAP to their health. Encourage your teen to take ownership of their health and treatment by making positive decisions.
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### To Learn More

- Sleep Disorders Center  
206-987-8938
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers 206-987-2280 (TTY)

### What might happen

**Your teen or young adult may complain that the machine or humidifier makes noise or hums.**

**It is common for caregivers to be concerned about their teenager's adjustment to CPAP.**

### Tips for CPAP use

- Have your teen turn it on upon walking into the room to get used to the noise.
- Have your teen listen to quiet music while falling asleep.
- Talk with sleep clinic staff about your concerns.
- If your teenager has special healthcare needs or emotional or behavioral disorders, stay in contact with staff from specialty clinics who may be able to offer tips to help your teen adjust to wearing a mask and using CPAP.

Call your home care company with any questions or concerns about the mask, mask fit or the machine.

For any concerns about your teen's health or breathing related to CPAP, call the Children's Hospital Sleep Disorders Center at 206-987-8938.

### Sleep disorder resource

National Sleep Foundation  
[www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org)

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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