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

Getting started with positive airway pressure (PAP)

Sleep is an important part of staying healthy for people 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 PAP (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 PAP during sleep. PAP helps your child wake up rested and function well throughout the day. Using PAP 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.

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.

To Learn More
• Sleep Disorders Center
  206-987-8938
• Ask your child’s healthcare provider
• seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services
• In the hospital, ask your 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.
What might happen

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.

Tips for PAP use

- After your child is prescribed PAP, take time to talk with them about their diagnosis and treatment. Talk about PAP in a way that helps make it a normal part of life. If your teen can explain why PAP has been prescribed, what PAP does and why using PAP is important to staying healthy, it demonstrates understanding and will help your teen adjust to using PAP. Encourage your teenager to share feelings or concerns about using PAP. Invite questions, either directed to you or to your child’s sleep specialist.

- 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 PAP to anyone or talk about PAP outside the home.

- 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.

- Encourage your teenager to attend a PAP support group to talk with other teens using PAP.

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

- If needed, talk with your teen to create healthy boundaries about who you need to talk with about PAP and why it is important for them to know about it. If you agree not to talk about PAP with certain people, honor that agreement. If you need to renegotiate your agreement, let your teen know.

- Teach your teen that using PAP is part of a growing independence and taking on adult responsibilities.

- Let your teen take an active role in PAP treatment. Teach them how to clean the mask, check the filters and read the display screen on the machine.

- Incorporate PAP-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 PAP mask every day. Avoid fighting or getting into a power struggle with your teen over wearing the mask. Make using PAP 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.
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 PAP 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 PAP to their health. Encourage your teen to take ownership of their health and treatment by making positive decisions.

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

- 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.

It is common for caregivers to be concerned about their teenager’s adjustment to PAP.

- 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 PAP.

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 PAP, call the Children’s Hospital Sleep Disorders Center at 206-987-8938.

Sleep disorders resource

National Sleep Foundation
sleepfoundation.org