

# Using PAP with Your Toddler (2 to 5 Years)

## Getting started with positive airway pressure (PAP)

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 child 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 toddler growing and developing?

Your toddler continues to grow and develop physically, mentally and emotionally. Toddlers usually can understand more than they can communicate. Children at this age begin developing language and verbal skills and their vocabulary grows rapidly each year. They have vivid imaginations and a limited understanding of cause and effect. They think very literally — a phrase like “You're driving me up the wall” is likely to be confusing and sound like nonsense to a child this age. Around 3½ years, children begin to understand the idea of good behavior and being rewarded in the future for what they do in the present (delayed gratification).

## What might happen

**Your toddler may refuse to put on the mask or pull off the mask repeatedly.**

## Tips for PAP use

- Set up a consistent bedtime routine, incorporate PAP into the routine and stick with it. Where appropriate, let your toddler help set the bedtime routine. Be consistent and firm about your toddler's PAP use. If your toddler pulls off the mask, replace it on your toddler's face.
- It is common when first using PAP for the mask to be pulled off in the middle of the night. You can choose to check on your child in the middle of the night and replace the mask if it has come off. Hopefully, this will only be a problem for the first few weeks, and your child will become used to the mask and wear it through the night. Your child will begin to understand that if the mask comes off, it will be replaced.
- Establish a transition time before bedtime. Let your child know how many minutes remain before it's time to begin the bedtime routine. Do not allow extra minutes or give your child less time than what you said.
- Keep the bedtime routine simple. For example, a child's bedtime routine could include changing into pajamas, brushing teeth, reading a bedtime story and putting on the PAP mask. Shift other activities (such as picking out clothes for the next day) to the next morning or other times of the day.

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## To Learn More

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



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### What might happen

**Your toddler may resist using PAP by throwing temper tantrums or crying. Your toddler may also regress in behavior as a sign of frustration or dissatisfaction. Your toddler may not be able to effectively communicate their feelings to you and may behave negatively or respond aggressively toward you, the bedtime routine or the PAP machine and mask.**

**Your toddler may ask a lot of questions or ask the same questions over and over.**

**Your toddler may like to play with the mask, but refuse to wear it at bedtime or naptime.**

**It is common for caregivers to be concerned about their toddler's reactions to CPAP.**

### Tips for PAP use

- Don't take this phase too personally — this is a normal stage. Your toddler's "No" may be an expression of dissatisfaction or a way for the child to try to gain control of the situation or push limits. Your toddler needs you to stay consistent during this time.
- Try giving your toddler extra choices around PAP, such as, "Do you want to push the button to start the PAP machine or do you want Mom or Dad to do it?" Or, "Do you want to read your bedtime story before or after putting on your mask?" Do not give your child a choice if there is not a choice to be made, such as in asking, "Do you want to wear your PAP mask or not?"
- Stop aggressive action right away. Teach your child healthy ways to verbalize feelings. Provide alternative methods for aggressive behavior and give positive feedback for non-aggressive behavior. Avoid fighting or getting into a power struggle with your child over wearing PAP. Make using PAP fun. Make it a game or activity, and continue to make it part of the bedtime routine.

Be prepared to answer your toddler's questions — repetition is one way children at this age learn. Your toddler may need to repeat an activity many times before adjusting to this new routine and activity.

Encourage your toddler's natural curiosity and positive play with the mask. Use that as a first step in getting your child used to the mask. (See the desensitization tips below.)

- Talk with your sleep clinic or home care company about your concerns.
- If your toddler has special healthcare needs, stay in contact with your specialty clinics. The clinic staff may be able to offer assistance in helping your child adjust to wearing a mask and using PAP.

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### Desensitization tips for your toddler

1. Practice relaxation or breathing techniques and breathing through the nose. This could be incorporated into part of the bedtime routine, or could be done in the car or anywhere.
2. Throughout the process, talk to your toddler about PAP while putting on the mask or getting ready for sleep. Talk about why they need to wear the mask and what it does. Explain the parts of the machine.
3. If your machine or humidifier makes noise or hums, turn it on upon walking in the room so your toddler gets used to the noise.
4. Let your toddler hold or play with the mask.
5. Try one or more of these ideas:
  - Put the mask and headgear on a teddy bear or doll. You may wish to give your toddler a doll or stuffed animal that wears a mask. (Be sure

- the mask is securely attached to the toy so that it is not a choking hazard.)
- Get masks or silly noses for family members to wear, such as toy animal noses, clown noses or a small plastic cup. Wear a mask or silly nose while holding your toddler or during the bedtime routine.
  - Give your toddler jobs related to PAP that they can help with, such as holding the mask while you put on the straps, turning on the machine or helping you clean the mask.
  - Give your toddler a doll to draw on. (Contact the Child Life Department at Children's at 206-987-3285.)
  - Read a book about firefighters with masks, color in a coloring book that features masks or create a puppet show about using PAP. Encourage your toddler to draw a mask on pictures of children or animals in coloring books.
6. Gradually move the mask closer and closer to your toddler's face. Place the mask on your toddler's face for 2 minutes and gradually increase to longer periods, with the tubing disconnected from the machine. If your toddler watches TV, start with a 60-second commercial and work up to a 15- to 30-minute cartoon. Your toddler may find it comforting to be held during this process.
  7. With the tubing connected and the machine turned on, let your toddler play with the airflow. Your toddler might speak into the airflow — pretend the airflow is a hair dryer or blow air in the face.
  8. Once your child can comfortably wear the mask for 30 minutes with the tubing disconnected from the PAP machine, repeat steps 1 through 3 with the tubing connected to the machine and the machine turned on. Do this until your child can wear the mask with the machine turned on. Hopefully, your toddler will be relaxed enough with the machine to be able to fall asleep with it on at bedtime.
    - Use positive reinforcements or rewards for any attempts your toddler makes. Use favorite video games, TV shows, toys, books and/or music to help distract your child from focusing on the new feelings of having the mask on. There is not a set length for the desensitization process, but it is important to work with your child every day. It is also helpful to work with your child on this process at least a few times each day, rather than only at night. Being able to wear the mask during the day while awake means that your child will be more likely to wear it at bedtime.
    - During the day, work toward wearing the mask for longer periods by rewarding your child with something they like. Try placing the mask on your child while watching a favorite video. If your child pulls the mask off, then turn off the video. Continue this until your child tolerates wearing the mask with the machine on.
  9. Have your toddler wear the headgear and mask with the PAP machine turned on to fall asleep when tired, either for a nap or at night. Once your child can fall asleep with the machine on and sleeps for most of the night with it on, you have successfully completed the desensitization plan. Congratulations!

Call your home care company with any questions or concerns about the mask, mask fit or the machine. For any concerns about your toddler's health or breathing related to PAP, call the Children's Hospital Sleep Disorders Center at 206-987-8938.

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### **Sleep disorders resource**

Jodi Mindell, *Sleeping Through the Night: How Infants, Toddlers and Their Parents Can Get a Good Night's Sleep.*