

Sleep-Wake Disorders Center - FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions...

Q: What is a “DME”?

Ans: DME is the abbreviation for suppliers of Durable Medical Equipment. DME companies provide a wide range of home patient care equipment such as oxygen, CPAP/BiPAP, and other medical devices. They also provide home pulse oximetry services that are sometimes ordered by sleep doctors.

Q: I just can't seem to be able to get used to my CPAP machine, and I stopped using it.

Ans: The biggest reason that people stop using CPAP/BiPAP equipment is due to poorly fitting or uncomfortable face masks. Many DME companies have a policy that allows you to try different types of face masks in the first 30 days until you find one that fits you. Don't give up! Work with your DME provider until you find a device that fits well and doesn't have air leaks. It may feel fine at the DME office, but when you try to sleep with it, it's a different story. CPAP can make a huge difference in the way you feel. Lack of restorative sleep affects your energy level, can cause weight gain, and increases risk for stroke and heart attack. Patients tell us that it takes several months to get used to wearing CPAP/BiPAP, but if you stick with it, the results are wonderful. If you are feeling claustrophobic, while wearing CPAP, let your sleep doctor know.

Q: I have a CPAP/BiPAP machine. If I'm having a bad breathing problem at night, what should I do?...

Ans: If you are wearing CPAP or BiPAP and have problems breathing, take your face mask off and sit up. If breathing without your mask on while sitting up is still very difficult you should go to the nearest emergency room or dial 911. Take your CPAP/BiPAP machine with you. If breathing is difficult because you have a stuffy nose, try saline spray or a nasal decongestant to unblock your nose and try your CPAP/BiPAP again. The Sleep-Wake Disorders Center does not provide emergency services. It does provide consultative service at both UAB Highlands and University Hospital for hospitalized patients. Patients must be in stable condition to have a sleep study. Sleep studies cannot be performed while a patient is hospitalized.

Q: How much sleep do I need?

Ans: Most adults need seven to nine hours of restorative sleep each night.

Q: I have problems with my CPAP, BiPAP machine:

- A. My CPAP/BiPAP hose has broken...
- B. My dog chewed up my hoses/face mask...
- C. My mask won't stay on my face...
- D. My CPAP machine isn't running...
- E. I feel like I'm suffocating...

F. I hear a lot of air leaks when I put on my mask...

G. Air from my CPAP blows into the corners of my eyes...

H. I have problems breathing out (exhaling) with my mask on...

Ans: (A–H). The Sleep/Wake Disorders Center does not repair or adjust equipment. The DME company who provided your equipment is responsible for taking care of repairs, ordering new hoses and masks, and making adjustments to your air pressure. DMEs can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling the phone number on the sticker found on your equipment. Explain your problem to the DME company. They will contact the Sleep Center to obtain a new prescription and obtain any necessary orders on your behalf. Some DME companies automatically notify you when it's time to order a new hose and mask, but you may want to keep up with this yourself. Most insurance providers allow you to order a new hose and mask every six months. If you need a new hose or mask, contact your DME company. If your CPAP machine needs a pressure adjustment, the DME company will contact the Sleep Center for new orders to adjust the pressure on your machine. If you've lost a lot of weight or gained a lot of weight recently, your mask may no longer fit you. Alert your DME company so they can contact your sleep doctor for a new prescription for a new face mask and possibly a pressure adjustment.

Q: Lately, I've begun to feel very tired in the mornings when I get up. I'm very sleepy during the day and have problems staying awake at meetings or while I'm driving. I've been using my CPAP machine for more than three years. Up until recently, I felt rested and refreshed after a night using my CPAP. What should I do?

Ans: Have you lost or gained a substantial amount of weight since getting your CPAP machine? If so, you may need to have your CPAP machine adjusted to accommodate your weight change. If you have gained weight, your pressure may need to be increased slightly. Make an appointment with your primary care doctor to see whether you might have some other medical or emotional problem that interferes with your sleep. If no new problem is found, make a follow-up appointment with your sleep doctor. Bring your CPAP or BiPAP equipment and face mask with you.

Q: My aunt says that lately she has been gaining weight and that some mornings she wakes up and finds crumbs and food all over her nightclothes and dirty dishes that weren't there the night before. She also says that food seems to be missing from her refrigerator and pantry.

Ans: Your aunt may be sleepwalking and eating, none of which she will remember. This can be dangerous for her if she eats uncooked meats or things that are not considered food (like toothpaste). A padlock on the refrigerator door and the pantry might also be helpful. She needs to see a sleep specialist.

Q: Do I need pre-certification from my insurance provider before seeing a sleep specialist or having a sleep study? Do I need a referral to be seen in the Sleep Center Clinic?

Ans: That depends upon your insurance provider. It is the patient's responsibility to check for any referral requirements by contacting their insurance provider. You may be able to see a sleep specialist for an appointment, but if a sleep study is recommended, you need to check with your insurance provider to see whether the cost of a sleep study is covered.