



Tips for the Bed-partners of PAP Users

Learning that your significant other has been diagnosed with a sleep disorder requiring the use of a CPAP (Continuous Positive Airway Pressure) or BiLevel Positive Airway Pressure device can be unsettling. When your partner has a sleep disorder, not only is he or she impacted by lost sleep and the health consequences of the underlying sleep condition, but the partner is also affected. The good news is that PAP (Positive Airway Pressure) treatment can significantly improve the user's medical condition and may also add nearly one hour of sleep every night for the partner, reduce marital conflict, and improve the quality of life of you and your partner.^{1,2} So how can you help your partner take full advantage of the benefits of PAP therapy?

1. Encourage your partner to use the PAP device during all hours of sleep

Sometimes it may take time to adjust to using the PAP mask and blower, but starting with short periods of use and progressively increasing the time can help. By starting with just a few hours a night or during naps and trying to increase daily use of the mask, your partner will eventually become accustomed to sleeping with the device the entire night.

2. Talk about it

The encouragement and support of the significant other is sometimes the primary reason PAP users stick with it.³ Many sleep disorder patients deal with a variety of feelings: guilt over disrupting the bed partner's sleep, anger due to the demoralization of being diagnosed, and frustration over feeling like the

snoring is driving the partners apart. Your partner's sleep issues may also negatively impact your sleep health due to snoring and/or the humming of the new medical device introduced to the bedroom.

- Focus on the positive. Discuss the benefits of treating a sleep disorder:
 1. Better control of other associated health issues linked to sleep apnea: diabetes, heart disease, excessive weight, stroke, and erectile dysfunction
 2. Improved ability to stay focused and alert
 3. Less risk for depression
 4. Fewer morning headaches
 5. Waking up refreshed in the morning
 6. Avoidance of falling asleep in inappropriate settings, such as when at work, while driving, or at social events.
 7. More interest and enjoyment in your daily activities
- Listen to your partner. Understand he/she may be dealing with a variety of emotions including guilt, denial, and/or frustration. If your partner is not initiating discussions regarding his/her health issues, try to identify opportunities to ask how he/she feels about the situation.
- Share your concerns for his/her health and how this also impacts you.

3. Encourage practices that contribute to success

- Try to maintain the same sleep/wake schedule every day, including weekends.
- Prepare healthy meals and eat meals at least several hours before bedtime.

- Avoid situations where your partner will be encouraged to have caffeine or alcohol before bedtime.
- Keep the bedroom dedicated to sleep and sexual activity.
- Avoid watching television in bed.
- Set aside time for you and your partner to exercise together.
- Gently remind your partner to put the mask on before sleep, including naptimes.
- Some partners experience sleep deprivation as a result of snoring or machine noise. Most partners become accustomed to the “white noise” from the device. But if this continues to be an issue, move the device under the bed or to an open bedside drawer to reduce noise. Be sure to keep the device open to air circulation. Consider a short-term bed separation during the initial trial. However, most professionals encourage partners to work together to eventually return to a shared bedroom environment.

4. Seek out advice of a doctor and other healthcare professionals

- Contact your PAP provider any time your partner has difficulty adjusting to the device. There are a number of options they can recommend to help both your partner and you adapt to the equipment.
- Speak to your physician or sleep specialist about other related health issues.

- In some cases, it may be helpful to seek help from a relationship counselor or psychiatric specialist. Lack of sleep contributes to moodiness, irritability, and fatigue — sometimes making productive communication a challenge.

5. Connect with other PAP users and their partners

Learning that others are going through the same things can be helpful. There are a number of online chat rooms and local groups you can join. The American Sleep Apnea Association A.W.A.K.E. network has sleep apnea support groups throughout the country, as well as online support at www.sleepapnea.org.

Also, check with your local sleep lab and/or PAP provider to learn what other support groups may be in your area.

6. Be patient

Solving a partner’s sleeping problems takes time. Some patients adapt to therapy very quickly and others take months to get there. It’s important to remain supportive. Don’t give up on an initial trial. Slow but steady progress is often the realistic path to getting your partner’s sleep disorder controlled and providing both of you with a healthy night of sleep.

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1. Baron, Kelly Glazer, et al. Relationship Quality and CPAP Adherence in Patients with Obstructive Sleep Apnea. Behavioral Sleep Medicine 2008; Vol.7, No. 1.
 2. Parish, JM, Lyng, PJ. Quality of Life in Bed Partners of Patients with Obstructive Sleep Apnea or Hypopnea after Treatment with Continuous Positive Airway Pressure. Chest Sept. 2003; 124 (3).
 3. <http://www.webmd.com/sleepdisorders/when-your-sleep-partner-has-sleep-disorder>.