

Ask the Expert
Arizona Republic

Q: I was recently diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnea by my doctor who prescribed a CPAP to help treat me. This seems like an extreme treatment method. Can this really help me, and is this a common way to treat someone with sleep apnea?

A: Sleep apnea is very common and, according to the National Institutes of Health, affects more than 12 million Americans. Obstructive sleep apnea is one kind of apnea in which there is a blockage of the airway where the soft tissue in the back of the throat collapses and closes during sleep. It's the most common form of apnea and results in poor sleep because when the apnea event occurs, the brain briefly arouses people so they will start breathing again.

There are several different treatment options for people with obstructive sleep apnea, such as positional therapy, oral appliances and even surgery. Sleep experts have found Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) to be the “gold standard” and the most effective non-surgical treatment for people who suffer from obstructive sleep apnea. Each machine is tailored to blow the right amount of air that is strong enough to keep a person's airway open.

Some people find their CPAP machine to be too big and slightly uncomfortable to wear at night. The good news for CPAP users is there are several manufacturers to choose from that have different features that allow patients to find the best machine for them. A CPAP machine is typically the size of a small tissue box, and some manufacturers are making them even smaller. There are different styles of masks to select from as well to help you to sleep more comfortably.

If your doctor prescribed a CPAP it's because he or she believes this is the best treatment option for you. It's so important that you treat your obstructive sleep apnea because without treatment, it can lead to other issues such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, memory problems and even motor vehicle crashes.

Obstructive sleep apnea is treatable. With treatment it will make you a happier and healthier person, and the person you share your bed with will also have a more restful night's sleep without the distraction of your tossing, turning and snoring.



Catholic Healthcare West



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