

Out With the Old, In With the New

Is it time to replace your CPAP mask and accessories?

A lot of people save a buck these days by making things last just a little longer. While it can't hurt to wear an old shirt a few more times, it can be dangerous to wear out a continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) mask and its accessories. By replacing CPAP supplies regularly, you'll save yourself more money and additional health problems in the long run.

Rules of replacement

The life of CPAP supplies depends on the brand and style you buy, how well you care for them, and how often you use them. Follow cleaning instructions carefully to keep them looking and working their best. But even if your CPAP supplies sparkle, it doesn't mean they'll last forever.

Even with the best cleaning, parts can eventually grow bacteria and make you sick if they're not replaced regularly. That's why most masks and accessories follow some general rules for replacement. You also should check with your supplier for specific details about your mask.

Change disposable filters every two weeks and replace non-disposable filters every six months. Keep a closer eye on them in the fall and winter — they tend to get dustier when the heat is on and the windows are closed.

If your mask has removable seals, change them every other week. Replace cushions and pillows about every two weeks or when the material hardens or softens with wear. Once that happens, the seal won't be as tight, and your treatment might not work as well.

Change your headgear at least every six



months. You'll know you need to replace it when you have to keep tightening the straps to make the headgear stay on. Overtightening can cause sores on your face and make treatment uncomfortable. You'll also want to change the reservoir on your heated humidifier around the same time. Replace your mask or nasal pillow system every three to six months. If it shows signs of wear, it begins to leak, there's a tear in the cushion, or it becomes very uncomfortable, it might be time to let it go.

Who's got you covered?

Medicare and most private insurance plans cover the replacements recommended above. Ask your provider about your specific coverage. Some equipment suppliers use automatic systems for replacement that can save you extra work and worry.

They'll check the type of supplies your plan replaces and how often they'll replace them, and then they'll ship them to you automatically every three months. If your company doesn't have a plan like this, see if they can email or call you with a reminder to replace your supplies.

If you have higher co-pays or pay out of pocket, ask your supplier about getting a mask with removable parts. It can be cheaper to replace single parts than having to replace the whole mask.

By using clean, fresh, up-to-date CPAP supplies, you'll stay healthier, sleep deeper, and breathe easier. ■

Information provided by Laura Castricone, CRT, and adapted from the University of Michigan Health System's MedEQUIP CPAP and Bilevel Team.

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Item:	Replace every:
Cushions/pillows Nasal pillows Disposable filters	2 weeks
Full face mask Nasal pillow system Tubing	3 months
Chinstrap Headgear Non-disposable filters	6 months

EDITOR'S NOTE: Your doctor or therapist has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. It is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your doctor or therapist.
