

## **5-Step PAP Desensitization Plan**

(as shown in the PAP Desensitization video)

- **STEP 1:** Hold the mask to your face for a few moments without attaching the mask to the hose. Then practice putting the mask on and off several times.

**Practice:** daytime, one or several days until you are feeling more comfortable.

- **STEP 2:** Wear your mask attached to the PAP device with the airflow turned on. Practice using PAP during the day while doing something relaxing and enjoyable such as reading, watching TV, or doing a relaxation exercise. *\*See below for relaxation exercise resources*

**Practice:** daytime, 20-30 minutes/day, daily for one week or until you are feeling more comfortable.

- **STEP 3:** Continue to wear your mask attached to the PAP device with the airflow turned on. Now extend the time you do this for an hour or two each day while doing something relaxing and enjoyable like watching a movie or a sports broadcast, reading or playing a game. You can also try lying down or reclining in this step.

**Practice:** daytime, up to 1-2 hours/day, daily for one week or until you are feeling more comfortable. If you are short on time, try for 40-60 minutes of practice.

***Tip:** If you feel any anxiety or frustration creeping in, you can also use additional relaxation strategies, such as listening to calming sounds or music, guided meditation, muscle relaxation or soothing imagery.*

- **STEP 4.** If you're trying to avoid naps, you can skip Step 4. Wear your mask attached to the PAP device with the airflow turned on. Take a short nap. Practice using PAP at any time when feeling sleepy or likely to fall asleep in the daytime.

**Practice:** daytime, daily or on days you take a nap, for several days up to a week, until you are feeling more comfortable.

- **STEP 5.** Use your PAP at bedtime. Wear your mask attached to the PAP device with the airflow turned on when you go to sleep. Start every night with your mask on and the PAP device turned on. At first, try to use your PAP as long as it is comfortable. Try increasing to 4 or more hours and then to the entire time you're asleep.

**Practice:** during sleep time, daily, continuing to use it every time you sleep

**Tip:** *If you take your mask off during sleep, don't worry about it. Put it back on when you notice that it's off; or just try again the next time you sleep.*

### **Additional Steps to Get Comfortable with PAP**

If you need more practice getting used to your PAP, you can add one or more of these additional steps:

- If just looking at the PAP makes you uneasy or anxious:
  - Put the PAP device with mask and hose on a table in a room where you spend time when you are awake. Make sure you can see it as you're doing relaxing and enjoyable activities. Over time, your brain and body will get used to seeing it in your environment, and you will feel less anxious around your PAP.
  - Put the PAP device with mask and hose in the bedroom where you would keep it when sleeping. Keep it here for a few days or more as you get used to seeing it in your bedroom.
  
- If you fall asleep with PAP on but wake up with the mask out of place:
  - Practice adjusting the mask with the hose attached – don't attach the hose to your machine.
    - Take the mask on and off repeatedly.
    - Practice while lying down and rolling around in bed to disrupt and repair mask seal.
  - During the day, practice putting your PAP on and taking it off in a dark room or with your eyes closed. This will help you to more easily put it back on during the night after waking with the mask off, or if you take it off when you get out of bed.
  
- If you have difficulty with the CPAP while lying flat:
  - Use pillows or a wedge to practice sleeping with the PAP while reclined. Make sure this position is comfortable with any injuries you may have.
  
- If the sound of the PAP makes you uneasy or anxious:
  - During the day, let the PAP device run while you are doing something relaxing and enjoyable (don't worry if your device turns off automatically).
  - Turn the machine on while you are sleeping without wearing the mask. Let the PAP device run to get used to the sound (don't worry if your device turns off automatically).
  
- The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has a number of free resources for relaxation techniques. You can use relaxation techniques such as muscle relaxation, guided imagery or mindfulness meditation while practicing using PAP.
  - These and other free VA apps are available on App Store or Google Play:

- **Insomnia Coach** (for relaxation tools, go to Tools, Relax Your Body)
- **Mindfulness Coach** to learn how to practice mindfulness
- These VA web sites have relaxation tools:
  - VA Whole Health Library:
    - [Guided Imagery - Whole Health Library \(va.gov\)](#)
    - [Progressive Relaxation - Whole Health Library \(va.gov\)](#)
    - [Progressive Muscle Relaxation - Whole Health Library \(va.gov\)](#)
  - Veterans Health Library:
    - Mindful Body Scan  
[https://www.prevention.va.gov/Recordings/bodyscan\\_mcmanus](https://www.prevention.va.gov/Recordings/bodyscan_mcmanus)
- You can use helpful self-talk to remind yourself that PAP is safe and effective. Try saying one or more of these things to yourself:
  - “Feeling some discomfort is typical at first.”
  - “Practicing and time will help me get used to the PAP.”
  - “This PAP is helping me breathe better while I sleep.”
  - “This PAP will help me feel better when I’m awake.”
  - “If I use my PAP, I’ll be doing something good for my health.”
- If you continue to struggle with PAP use after daily practice for several weeks to a month, please let your sleep clinic or primary care provider know. Many VAs have providers who can offer additional help with this process.