

Help with Breathing

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

FACT SHEET



Lung problems make it hard for you to breathe sometimes. You have choices about treatments that will help you breathe with greater ease and less stress.

These choices include:

- Being put on a ventilator or “vent” (breathing machine).
- Using a mask that gently pushes air into your lungs (BiPAP).
- Using medicine.

This fact sheet describes and explains your choices. The time to make these choices is when you feel well and have the facts you need. Think about what is meaningful in your life and what you need to live well. Ask questions and talk with your doctor and others. The doctor who knows you best can help you decide what to do.

WHAT IS a ventilator (breathing machine)?

This machine pushes air and oxygen into your lungs to help you breathe. It is hooked to a tube that goes through your mouth into your throat (windpipe). You cannot speak or swallow when this tube is in. You will need medicine to help you stay calm. You will need to be in the ICU while on a breathing machine.

WHAT IS bi-level positive air pressure (BiPAP)?

BiPAP pushes oxygen into your lungs through a tight-fitting mask over your nose and mouth. You can try BiPAP if you do not want to be on a ventilator. The tight-fitting mask might hurt or push on your skin. Air can go into your belly and cause pain. It may be hard to talk.

WOULD A ventilator or BiPAP work for me?

A ventilator or BiPAP may or may not work for you.

A ventilator or BiPAP will work best if:

- Your lung problem can be fixed.
- You are using either device for a short time to get better after surgery or a sudden illness.

A ventilator or BiPAP will not work as well if:

- Your body is shutting down from long-lasting health problems.
- You have an illness that can no longer be treated.
- You are not able to withstand the air pressure required to move oxygen in and out of your lungs.



IF YOU WANT to try a ventilator or BiPAP

If you think you want to try a ventilator or BiPAP, you will still need to talk to your doctor and family about what you would want them to do if either device does not work for you. What if your health gets worse? What if you cannot think or talk? Because you will not be able to speak while on a ventilator, now is the time to share your wishes.

IF YOU DECIDE not to have a ventilator or BiPAP, we can give you medicine to help you breathe easier.

Sometimes people with lung disease do not want any machines. They no longer want to try to fix their lung problems, but want to allow a natural death. They prefer to be comfortable and have medicine control their shortness of breath or fear caused by breathing problems. Some people feel relaxed when:

- Oxygen is given through a soft, flexible nose tube.
- They meditate (focus on calming thoughts).
- They pray.
- They listen to music.

There are many choices you can make to help you live as well as possible and be comfortable. If you do not want to try a ventilator or BiPAP, you need to tell your doctor and family. We can make plans that follow your wishes.





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