

BiPAPs, Ventilators and Masks

A Personal Note

[Daniel J. Wilson, PhD](#)



I have been wearing masks for assisted breathing for some 20 years. I had polio in 1955 when I was five. I developed scoliosis and had a spinal fusion in 1960, but over the decades my spine curved above and below the fusion. In 2000 I was diagnosed with sleep apnea and put on a BiPAP. I initially found it difficult to adjust to the mask. The first night, my Wheaten Terrier, Abbey fled the bed thinking I had turned on a vacuum machine! She eventually got used to it and returned to our bed. I, too, initially found it difficult to adjust to wearing a nasal mask at night. For the first several nights, I didn't make it all the way through the night before I took it off. But I persisted. After a week or ten days, I discovered that I was sleeping through the night and waking up much more rested. After a few years, supplemental oxygen was added to the Bi-PAP.

After I was hospitalized with pneumonia in 2013, I was switched to a [Trilogy ventilator](#) at night which provided more support, with its supplemental oxygen. Following the pneumonia, I found myself short of breath during the day, and with the support of my pulmonologist, began to use an old Bi-PAP during the day while sitting in my usual chair. However, I had to switch to a nasal pillow mask so that I could wear my glasses (which wasn't a problem when I was sleeping). Since then, I have used a ventilator every night, the Bi-PAP during the day at home, and oxygen when I go out of the house. (For example, to a restaurant in pre-COVID days.)

I don't particularly like wearing a mask most of the day and night, but I like breathing comfortably even more. The machines mean that I don't have to struggle to breathe, and that is comforting. For me, a key is finding comfortable masks. Recently I was in the hospital with kidney stones and the nasal mask the hospital provided was a disaster. It was cheap, didn't fit well, and leaked. I went back to the nasal pillows I had brought with me and then had my wife bring my nasal mask from home. The lesson I took from this was the importance of a well fitting, comfortable mask.

Several different companies make masks and many masks come in different sizes. My nasal pillow mask comes with three different size nasal pillows to fit different nostrils. If one doesn't work, ask your therapist to try another until you find one you can live with comfortably. When you find a comfortable one, persist in wearing it until it becomes second nature. You will breathe more easily, be more rested, and healthier.

Wearing a mask attached to a machine 24/7 is not what I would have chosen 20 years ago, but today I wouldn't give up either the masks or the machines.

Dr. Wilson's Complete Inventory of work is easily available.

[Dr. Daniel J. Wilson, PhD – Putting the Pieces of Polio History Together](#)