

ISSUED: 26 MARCH 2008

PRESS RELEASE

NICE recommends treatment for sleep disorder

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today (26 March) published guidance on the use of continuous positive airways pressure (CPAP) devices to treat obstructive sleep apnoea/hypopnoea syndrome, also known as OSAHS.

The guidance states that:

- CPAP is recommended as a possible treatment for adults with moderate or severe sleep apnoea.
- CPAP may also be a possible treatment for people with mild sleep apnoea, but only if:
 - their symptoms affect their quality of life and ability to go about their daily activities, **and**
 - lifestyle advice (for example about losing weight, stopping smoking and cutting down on alcohol) and all other possible treatments have not worked or are not appropriate for that person.
- A person with sleep apnoea should be assessed and treated by a specialist in sleep disorders.

Obstructive sleep apnoea/hypopnoea syndrome is a condition in which a person stops breathing for a short time when they are asleep because of closing or narrowing of the throat caused by a decrease in the tone of the muscles supporting the airway. This can happen many times during the night, and causes the person to wake up for very short periods to allow normal breathing to restart (although usually the person won't remember

waking up). Complete closure of the airway (obstruction) stops airflow (apnoea) whereas partial obstruction decreases airflow (hypopnoea). A person with sleep apnoea often snores, may be unusually sleepy during the day and may have problems in concentrating because of lack of sleep. Major risk factors for developing OSAHS include increasing age, obesity and being male. OSAHS has been reported to affect up to 4% of middle-aged men and 2% of middle-aged women in the UK. It is estimated that 1% of men in the UK may have severe OSAHS.

A CPAP device consists of a mask that is worn by the person during sleep, which is connected to a pump that creates a flow of air. This airflow is slightly pressurised, which stops the person's throat from closing or narrowing during sleep.

Dr Gillian Leng, NICE Deputy Chief Executive and Executive Lead for this appraisal, said: "OSAHS can be a debilitating condition that affects both the individual and their immediate family. It can also have a wider impact through the increased risk of road traffic accidents caused by people with untreated or undiagnosed OSAHS. This guidance will ensure that people with this condition, wherever they live in England and Wales, will be able to access an effective treatment that has the potential to significantly improve their quality of life, as well as reduce the number of road traffic accidents caused by excessive sleepiness."

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. The guidance is available at www.nice.org.uk/TA139

About NICE

2. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health.
3. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
 - **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
 - **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments and procedures within the NHS
 - **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.