

Help with Breathing

A Guide for Decision Making

If you have a lung problem which makes it difficult for you to breathe, and you become acutely ill, there are three different types of medical interventions that can be used to help your breathing. You have a choice as to what interventions you want, and what you don't want and the best time to make these decisions is when you have the facts you need and are not in a breathing crisis.

One choice is to be put on a **ventilator**. This is a machine that pushes oxygen into your lungs. You would have a tube placed that goes through your mouth down into your throat. This can be uncomfortable so you will be given medications to help you stay calm. You will not be able to speak or swallow while the tube is in place. You will also need to be in the Intensive Care Unit to receive this treatment.

Another choice is to use a **BiPAP machine**. This is a machine that pushes air into your lungs through a tight mask that is placed over your nose and mouth. The mask might be uncomfortable due to the pressure on your skin and it may be hard to talk. Additionally, air could go into your belly which might cause pain. You may need to be in the Intensive Care Unit to receive this treatment.

Ventilator or BiPAP treatments work best if your lung problem can be fixed or you are using the device for a short period of time to recover from surgery or a sudden illness. **These interventions will not work as well** if your body is becoming weaker from a long standing health condition, or you have a lung problem that cannot be fixed.

A third choice to help ease your breathing is with medication to help relax your breathing, and oxygen given by a small soft tube placed just inside your nose. Other measures that may help are sitting in a more upright position, opening the window or directing a fan so you can feel the air move across you, listening to music, and prayer or meditation. These are considered comfort measure interventions which will help you be more comfortable, though they will not fix your underlying lung problem.

Compiled from variety of sources
For more information, please call
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