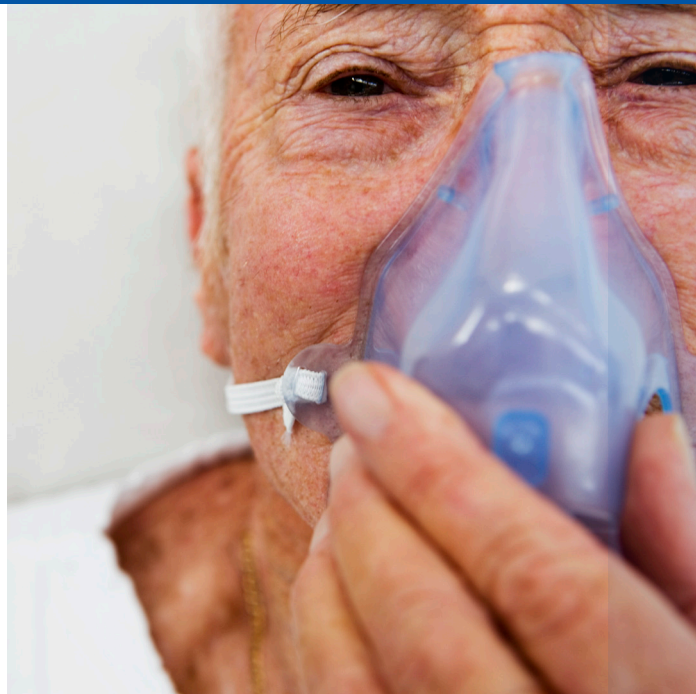


# Problems with Breathing

This fact sheet will help you decide if breathing devices are right for you. The best time to make these decisions is when you are feeling well. You should discuss the side effects and advantages with your health care providers and family.

**Sometimes people with lung problems have trouble breathing. A doctor can help patients with breathing problems by:**

- Putting the patient on a ventilator or “vent” (breathing machine)
- Using a mask that pushes air into the patients lungs (BIPAP)
- Using medicine to make the patient comfortable



## How do ventilators work?

Ventilators push air and oxygen into the lungs to help you breathe. There is a tube that is placed through your mouth and into your throat (windpipe) which is then connected to the ventilator. Ventilators will work best if your lung problem can be fixed. Or is only needed for a short period of time, such as after a surgery or with a sudden illness. A ventilator often helps keep people alive. Even so, people with very serious illness may prefer not to have a ventilator or to have one removed.

## Reasons not to use a ventilator include:

- They interfere with your ability to speak and swallow.
- They do not reverse the disease.
- They are uncomfortable. You may require extra sedation.
- If you are very sick, you may not be able to recover enough to come off the ventilator.
- You will need to be in the ICU. You may need many blood tests and X rays to monitor your condition.

These are all things to consider when deciding whether or not to try a ventilator. For one or two weeks, a ventilator can be hooked up through your nose or mouth. For a longer period, you would need a tracheostomy (a hole in your throat to insert the tube).

As with other decisions you will make at the end of life, this one is complex because of the emotional issues raised by stopping a ventilator. Nevertheless, you can choose to forgo all use or to have a time-limited trial with a planned withdrawal.

## What is BiPAP (bi-level positive air pressure)?

BiPAP uses a tight-fitting mask over your nose and mouth to push oxygen into your lungs. Sometimes



