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Robert O Young DSc, PhD  May 1 3 min read

WHAT CAN HAPPEN FROM PROLONGED USE OF WEARING A N95 MASK[1]

Updated: 5 days ago



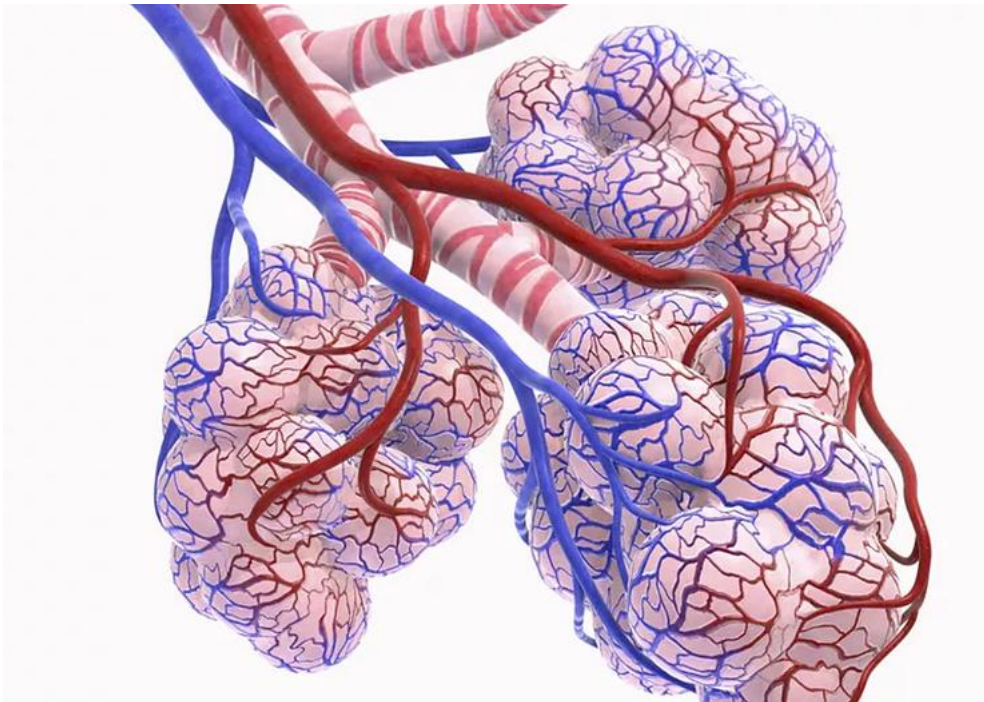
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The normal breathing process is when you inhale, you are breathing in oxygen. When you exhale, you are breathing out carbon dioxide/CO₂, an acidic gas.

Prolonged use of a facial mask can disrupt the normal airway, breathing process and inhaling excessive amounts of carbon dioxide/CO₂ instead of oxygen/O₂ causing a condition called hypercapnia.[2]

What is Hypercapnia



Hypercapnia is excess carbon dioxide (CO₂) build-up in your body. The condition, also described as hypercapnea, hypercarbia, or carbon dioxide retention, can cause effects such as headaches, dizziness, and fatigue, as well as serious complications such as seizures or loss of consciousness. Hypercapnia may develop as a complication of chronic lung diseases such as COPD, bronchiectasis, emphysema, interstitial lung disease, and cystic fibrosis, as well as some neurological and muscle diseases.[2]



- Fatigue
- An inability to concentrate or think clearly
- Headaches
- Flushing
- Dizziness
- Dyspnea (shortness of breath)
- Tachypnea (rapid breathing)
- Increased blood pressure

Because these effects can be vague, you might not realize that they are caused by hypercapnia. Some people who have lung disease measure their own oxygen levels at home with a pulse oximeter, but this device cannot detect hypercapnia.

Your CO₂ level may be too high even if your oxygen level is normal.

When you have a chronic respiratory disease, your CO₂ level may be slightly elevated or may increase gradually over the course of years as your disease progresses. You can also experience sudden bouts of hypercapnia during exacerbations of a pulmonary condition.[2-11]

The level of CO₂ in your blood can increase abruptly if you develop a severe lung infection, especially if you already have a chronic lung disease like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).[3]

Complications

Severe hypercapnia can cause noticeable and distressing effects. You may experience sudden respiratory failure, which can lead to a coma and may even be fatal.

Serious, urgent symptoms of hypercapnia can include:[2-11]

- Paranoia, depression, and confusion
- Muscle twitches
- Seizures
- Palpitations (a feeling that you are having a rapid heart rate)
- Panic, or a feeling of impending doom
- Dilation (widening) of superficial veins in the skin
- Papilledema (swelling of the optic nerve)



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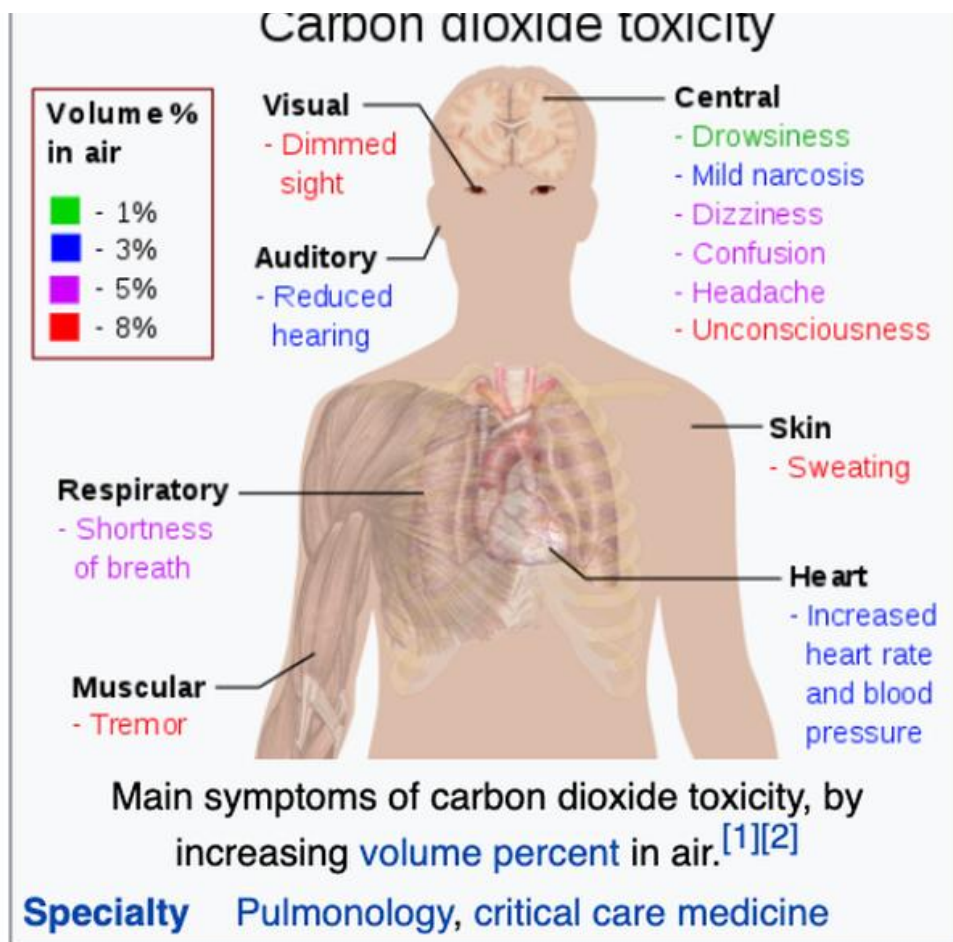
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