



Using Oxygen at Home

A Patient & Carers Guide

November 2011

What is it?

Oxygen therapy means using an oxygen cylinder or a machine to breathe in air that contains more oxygen than normal.

How does oxygen work?

Oxygen therapy increases the amount of oxygen in the lungs and the bloodstream. A person with a heart or lung disease may need oxygen therapy if they have low oxygen levels in their blood. Oxygen is only used for this purpose - it is not a treatment for breathlessness.

There are rare exceptions for using oxygen like people suffering with certain diseases of nerves and/or muscles, or those with a specific type of headache.

Oxygen therapy may be given by different methods, including:

- a tube placed under a person's nose (nasal cannula)
- a face mask placed over a person's mouth and nose (oxygen face mask)
- an endotracheal tube placed into the mouth and down the windpipe of a person who cannot breathe on their own. The tube is attached to a machine (ventilator) that breathes for the person or via a mask attached to an opening in the throat called a tracheotomy.

What are the benefits of oxygen at home?

Oxygen therapy corrects the low oxygen levels in your bloodstream caused by your heart or lung disease. By correcting the oxygen level, it helps your body to cope better.

Sometimes you may not feel a direct benefit from using the oxygen, but long term benefits have been shown. Home oxygen can be prescribed in several different forms, and the health professional that assesses and discusses your lifestyle with you will decide what is best for you.

Using oxygen therapy at home

You may only need oxygen at home for a short period of time. Being prescribed oxygen either after a hospital stay or after an assessment by a health professional does not mean you will always need oxygen.

If you do need oxygen at home, it is important to learn how to use and take care of your equipment.

This information will help you get the most from your oxygen treatment.

After your doctor/nurse prescribes oxygen, there are a few things to know about using oxygen at home.

Basic instructions

- Do not light candles, lanterns, fires, and cookers or smoke while you are wearing your oxygen. There is a serious risk of fire or burns.
- Do not change the setting on your oxygen without talking to your doctor/nurse or member of the Oxygen Team first. Turning the flow rate up or down could put you in danger.
- Keep track of how much oxygen is in the cylinder/tank (in case you are not on an oxygen concentrator – a machine that plugs into an electric socket), and order in advance so you don't run out.
- Do not drink alcohol or take drugs that relax you, such as sleeping pills, sedatives or recreational drugs, while using oxygen. They can cause you to breathe too slowly.
- Call your GP if you feel:
 - increasingly short of breath
 - restless or confused
 - have early morning headaches
 - very tired.

If you use nasal cannulae (prongs):

- Wash the nasal prongs with soap and water once or twice a week. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on caring for your equipment.
- Replace the prongs every two to four weeks. If you have a cold or the flu, change them when your symptoms pass. Your home oxygen supplier can provide this for you.
- Use a water-based moisturiser (such as KY Jelly or similar) on your lips and in your nose to prevent drying and cracking. Read labels, and look for a product that lists water as the first ingredient.
- Do not use petroleum-based products (such as Vaseline petroleum jelly) as these can plug the air holes and are also a fire hazard and can potentially cause chemical burns.
- Put a piece of gauze under the tubing to keep the skin behind your ears from getting sore.

Is it safe to use oxygen at home?

YES. However, you must use it safely. Oxygen is a fire hazard. Follow safety measures to keep you and your family/ carers safe.

- Never smoke or let anyone else smoke while you are using oxygen. Put up no smoking signs, and be aware of people smoking near you if you are using your oxygen outside of your home.
- Keep oxygen at least six feet (two metres) away from flames or heat sources such as gas cookers, paraffin or gas heaters, candles, cigarettes, cigars and fireplaces.
- Do not use flammable products, such as cleaning fluid, paint thinner, petroleum based creams or aerosols, while you are using oxygen.
- Keep a fire extinguisher at home within easy reach.
- Keep oxygen cylinders upright. Make sure they do not fall over and get damaged, especially when travelling in a vehicle. Ask your supplier for transport box.
- Inform your local fire station that you have oxygen at home. They advise on keeping safe.
- Ensure you have smoke/fire alarms within your home that are in

working order (the local fire service can advise you and supply you with them).

- If you have portable (ambulatory) oxygen, make sure you have an oxygen sticker for your car (available from the Fire Service) in case you are in an accident, and ask your oxygen supplier about safe transport of your oxygen.

Will I become dependent on oxygen?

NO. You have been prescribed oxygen as you have low blood oxygen levels. You will be advised on how many hours per day you need to use it. However if you want to go out or have a short time away from home, it will normally be alright to come off the oxygen for a while. Sometimes you may be prescribed oxygen to use outside of the home. You will not become dependent on oxygen, and it will never lose its useful effects.

Will I have to be treated with oxygen forever?

Every person is different and it is impossible to tell if you will always need oxygen therapy.

Blood tests look at the amount of oxygen you have in your blood. This tells us if you need more or less oxygen, or if it can be stopped and removed from your home.

Can I have too much oxygen?

YES. It is important to attend any oxygen review appointments or speak to your GP/Nurse if your oxygen needs have not been assessed in the last 12 months.

Oxygen is a prescribed drug that all patients must be carefully assessed for. It is not true that oxygen can cause no harm. Only a small number of people who have been assessed will need oxygen prescribing and benefit from it. People who take oxygen when they do not have low oxygen levels in their blood may get several short and long term harmful effects such as loss of independence, muscle wasting and an increase of carbon dioxide levels in the bloodstream, and as the breathing may become poor this may become life threatening.

If you are worried that you or someone you know has been given oxygen without a proper assessment, please contact your GP or member of the Oxygen Team. If you were given oxygen to take home when you were poorly in hospital, you need to be assessed again. You may be taking oxygen unnecessarily and risking harmful side effects.

Can I travel if I have oxygen?

YES. Plan in advance to make sure your trip goes well:

- Talk to your GP for advice on if you're safe to travel, and what you need to do to stay safe while travelling. Get at least one copy of your Home Oxygen Order Form (HOOF), along with your usual medication, to take with you on the trip. If travelling abroad, have an early discussion with your GP or community nurse.
- Travelling with oxygen can be done if you plan ahead. Before the trip, tell the travel company that you use oxygen. Do this well in advance, as they may have requirements that can take some time to arrange.
- Travel insurance is essential when travelling with oxygen. The British Lung Foundation and the British Heart Foundation can provide a list of companies that insure travellers with oxygen.
- Tell your oxygen supplier about your plans, as it may be possible to have oxygen delivered directly to your destination. You will need a copy of your HOOF for this.

Where to go from here

Now that you have read this information, you are ready to start using oxygen at home.

Talk with your GP or nurse

If you have questions about this information, take it with you when you visit your healthcare professional. You may want to mark areas or make notes in the margins where you have questions.

Contact details:

- Community Specialist Nurse: _____
- Air Products: 0800 373 580
- British Lung Foundation: 0845 850 5020 (Monday - Friday, 10am - 6 pm) www.lunguk.org
- British Heart Foundation: 0300 330 3311 (Monday - Friday, 9 am - 5 pm) www.bhf.org
- Expert Patients Programme: 0800 032 6016

If you have a community matron or district nurse, remember to ask them if you have any queries or concerns about your oxygen.


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PATIENT AGREEMENT FOR THE SUPPLY OF OXYGEN AT HOME

The purpose of this agreement is to help communication and prevent misunderstanding about your oxygen therapy. The treatment you are taking is to improve your oxygen blood levels. It is your responsibility to report your use of the oxygen and how it is affecting you accurately.

It is the responsibility of your GP or other healthcare professional to provide other options that will improve your breathing.

Form issued by:

Unit/practice name: _____

Unit/practice address: _____

_____ Postcode: _____

Contact telephone number: _____

Patient's details:

Patient's name: _____

Patient's home address: _____

_____ Postcode: _____

Date of Birth: ____/____/____ NHS number: ____/____/____

Patient's telephone number: _____

Patient's signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

I confirm that I am the healthcare professional responsible for the care of this patient and I have completed this form on his/her behalf as he/she is unable to provide/withhold consent.

Name: (PRINT) _____

Signature: _____ Date: ____/____/____

- I understand that my oxygen requirements may change and adjustments to my prescription may be necessary, including the oxygen being stopped and the equipment being removed from my home.
- I will communicate fully with my healthcare professional about the character and intensity of my condition, the effect of the treatment on my daily life, and how well the oxygen therapy is helping.
- I have the right to have my condition checked regularly and my treatment adjusted as appropriate.
- I have the right to stop my treatment, but I must consult with my GP first.
- I will not share my oxygen therapy with anyone.
- I will safeguard my oxygen from loss or theft. Lost or stolen cylinders may not be replaced.
- I agree that I will use my treatment at a rate no greater than the prescribed rate.
- I agree to my healthcare professional informing the Fire Service that I am a home oxygen user for safety purposes.
- I will allow the oxygen supplier to enter my home to maintain their equipment or change prescribed oxygen rates.
- I will allow my oxygen to be collected from my home once my GP/nurse decides the treatment is no longer necessary.

I agree to follow these guidelines that have been fully explained to me. My questions and concerns regarding treatment have been adequately answered. A copy of this document has been given to me.

This agreement is entered into on: ____/____/____

Patient's signature: _____

Carer's signature: _____

GP/healthcare professional signature: _____