

## Respiratory Physiology

# Palliative Oxygen

### Why have I been given oxygen?

The team who are looking after you have decided that oxygen therapy might be of benefit to you.

Oxygen is vital for our bodies and having low oxygen levels can make you feel unwell. Oxygen however is not very successful at treating the feeling of breathlessness, and breathlessness does not always mean your oxygen levels are low.

**Oxygen has to be prescribed by a specialist oxygen team.**

### How will I be given oxygen and what equipment will I have?

Oxygen therapy involves receiving extra oxygen via specific oxygen equipment. You may be given oxygen either by an oxygen concentrator or oxygen cylinders.

An oxygen concentrator is a machine that draws in room air and filters it to give you the correct amount of oxygen that you have been prescribed. This means you will never run out of oxygen. It is the size of a suitcase and is plugged in to an electricity socket. Don't worry about the electricity cost: this will be funded by the NHS.

Oxygen cylinders are specialised round metal containers, which contain compressed gas. They contain a fixed amount of oxygen which can be replaced when they run out.



## Patient Information

The oxygen can be delivered via a nasal cannula (2 prongs which go up your nose). These can be hooked over both ears and are gently secured under your chin. You may also be given a clear mask which fits over your mouth and nose and can be adjusted for comfort.

Your oxygen specialist will prescribe the equipment that best suits your needs.

### **How much oxygen do I need?**

This can vary and you will be guided by your oxygen specialist. Some people use it for short periods of time whilst others use it 24h a day. You might find it helpful to use your oxygen when you feel breathless, especially at times of exertion such as washing, dressing and climbing the stairs.

The oxygen flow rate that you are prescribed can also vary and again you will be guided by your specialist. They will let you know which setting your equipment should be on and you must never change the setting without speaking to your oxygen specialist first.

### **How do I get the oxygen?**

Your doctor will have consulted the oxygen team who will have filled out an order form to have the oxygen installed.

A company called Baywater Healthcare will come and install all the oxygen equipment into your home and show you how to use it.

### **Can oxygen be harmful?**

Some people may be unsuitable for oxygen but this would have been found before the oxygen is prescribed. That is why it is very important you do not adjust your flow rate without speaking to your oxygen specialist beforehand. Generally oxygen is safe when it is used properly.

Sometimes when using oxygen, nasal dryness may occur. This may easily be treated with water based lubricants, which your GP can prescribe or you can get at a pharmacy. You should not use any oil/petroleum based products such as Vaseline.

## Patient Information

Occasionally people may develop problems associated with the retention of carbon dioxide, the waste gas in our bodies. Symptoms of this can include headaches, especially in the morning. If you get any unexplained headaches or signs of unexplained confusion or drowsiness then you must contact your oxygen specialist.

### **How to care for your oxygen equipment**

Check your nasal cannula or mask frequently to ensure that the tips are not blocked. If required you can wipe with a damp cloth.

Change your nasal cannula or mask at least every 6 weeks. If you have had a chest infection you should change them straight after you are better. If you require more nasal cannula or masks just phone Baywater who will provide you with more.

Dust your concentrator every week with a damp cloth, ensuring it has been turned off and the power lead has been unplugged.

The air filter at the back of the concentrator must be cleaned weekly. Simply remove the filter and replace it with a spare one. Wash the old filter in hot soapy water, rinse thoroughly and allow it to dry naturally. If you do not have a spare filter, then contact Baywater who will provide you with one.

### **Should I inform anyone now I have oxygen?**

Inform your electricity company if you have an oxygen concentrator. They will then put you on their priority list should there be a power cut.

Also inform your home insurance company, but this should not affect your premium.

### **Oxygen Safety**

When used correctly oxygen is safe. But you do need to follow some basic safety advice:

- **Do not smoke or let anyone smoke (including e-cigarettes) near you when you are using your oxygen**

Smoking will aggravate your condition and is dangerous when using oxygen. Materials burn more vigorously when in contact with oxygen than with air.

- **Do not use e-cigarettes or let anyone else use them**

## Patient Information

This includes reusable and disposable electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), cigars, pipes and similar battery powered tobacco replacement products which use a heating element (atomiser) to produce a vapour resembling smoke. There have been incidents where the e-cigarettes have exploded or ignited whilst being recharged or in an oxygen rich environment

- **Keep away from naked flames**

All oxygen equipment should be kept well away from naked flames such as birthday or scented candles, open fires and gas cookers.

- **Keep away from heat**

Oxygen is not explosive but it will help fires to burn more fiercely. Ensure that your oxygen cylinders and your concentrator are kept away from fires, cookers and heaters etc.

- **Turn it off**

Turn off the oxygen supply when it is not in use. When using your oxygen concentrator do not leave your mask or cannula in your lap or lying on the bed for any length of time. Oxygen may build up in the material and make it more flammable.

Your oxygen concentrator will be positioned in a safe place within your home by Baywater and should not be moved.

Baywater will also notify the local fire and rescue service that you have oxygen. They should be in contact with you to arrange a free fire safety check. However, you can also request one for yourselves by going to your local fire and rescue website.

### **Other useful contact details**

Baywater: 0800 373 580

Baywater website with lots of useful additional information:  
[www.baywater.co.uk](http://www.baywater.co.uk)

British Lung Foundation: [www.blf.org.uk](http://www.blf.org.uk)

If you have further questions or have a problem with your oxygen prescription, please contact the Home Oxygen Service on 024 7696 6734 or email: [uhc-tr.Oxygen-Service@nhs.net](mailto:uhc-tr.Oxygen-Service@nhs.net)

## Patient Information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6734 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

### Document History

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