

Respiratory Physiology Department

Ambulatory Oxygen Therapy: A Patient's Guide

Introduction

A lot of people with a chronic lung disease do not need oxygen therapy when sitting or walking very short distances. However, the body needs more oxygen when we're active and so a person's oxygen level may drop when they exercise. These people may benefit from using supplementary oxygen when they are active. This kind of oxygen is called Ambulatory Oxygen Therapy.

Ambulatory oxygen is delivered by equipment that can be carried by most patients, usually a small cylinder or concentrator. It is intended for patients who have low oxygen levels when active **and** would like to attend pulmonary rehabilitation, improve their exercise tolerance or undertake outdoor activities.

Ambulatory oxygen therapy is associated with significant improvements in health status. On its own it can improve quality of life and exercise tolerance. People with COPD and interstitial lung diseases are often, but not always, able to walk further when using ambulatory oxygen therapy.

You may still feel breathless when using ambulatory oxygen because of your lung condition. If you would like more information about managing breathlessness then please speak to a member of the oxygen team.



When would I need an ambulatory oxygen assessment?

Patients with chronic lung disease whose oxygen level drops to less than 90% when they exercise, but who have normal oxygen levels at rest, are eligible for an ambulatory oxygen assessment. Your doctor or specialist nurse can refer you to the Home Oxygen Team for this assessment.

Ambulatory oxygen must be carried and is intended for moderate activity. Therefore it is not suitable if you are housebound, wheelchair bound, use large walking aids or are unable to carry the equipment yourself. It is not safe to have ambulatory oxygen if you currently smoke.

Oxygen therapy is only given to patients who have low oxygen levels when exercising; it is not used as a treatment for breathlessness or anxiety.

What happens if I'm sent for an ambulatory assessment?

In order for your ambulatory oxygen assessment to be accurate, you should have been free from chest infections and exacerbations for six weeks before your appointment. If you need to postpone it, then please contact the Oxygen Team beforehand. If you normally use inhalers then you can take these as normal on the day of the test. It is advisable to wear comfortable clothing and shoes and not to have a big meal before you attend.

During the assessment you will be asked to do a walking test while wearing a probe on your finger which measures your oxygen levels. You may be asked to repeat the walking test for a second time in order to see how much supplementary oxygen you require. We will ask you how breathless you feel before and after walking using a breathlessness scale.

What happens to me after my ambulatory assessment is complete?

If you require ambulatory oxygen, we will explain how much oxygen you need and when to use it. **Ambulatory oxygen should only be used when you are active, for example walking. It is not intended to use at rest.** Supplementary oxygen can be harmful if used when it is not needed.

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We will always see you again if you are prescribed oxygen. We will see you initially after three months for a follow up appointment. We will discuss your ambulatory prescription and find out how you are getting on with it. If all is well then we will see you for a review once a year or sooner if needed.

Where do I get the oxygen prescription?

Once the ambulatory assessment has been completed, with your consent, the specialist nurse or physiologist will complete a Home Oxygen Order Form, (HOOFF). This form is sent to a company called Baywater, who deliver oxygen around Coventry and Rugby. The oxygen is usually delivered to your home within three working days.

- Baywater usually contact you prior to their visit to let you know when they are coming;
- A Baywater engineer will come to your home and fully install your oxygen and explain how to use all the equipment;
- You will be given an information pack by the engineer.

What happens if I have problems with my oxygen or my oxygen runs out?

If your oxygen cylinders are running low and you need to replace them or have a problem with the cylinders or conserver device, then contact Baywater by phone or order new cylinders on their website. Baywater will usually replace the cylinders the next working day. It is advisable to contact them before they completely run out.

If you have a medical problem concerning your oxygen prescription then you can contact the HOS-AR Team or the Respiratory Physiology Department. Contact details are given at the end of this leaflet.

What happens if I am going on holiday?

If you are going on holiday then please let Baywater know in advance. If you are going on holiday in Great Britain then they can contact local oxygen suppliers in the area you are visiting so that you can have your cylinders refilled while you are away and somebody should be able to help if your equipment stops working. If you are going abroad then they can

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advise you on what you will need to do to continue using your therapy abroad.

If you plan to fly, then please contact your Respiratory Consultant or the Home Oxygen Team **before** you book your flight. You will need to be assessed to see whether or not you need supplementary oxygen when you are on an aeroplane.

For more information, please ask a member of the oxygen team for our leaflet *Holidays with Oxygen Therapy*.

Basic Safety

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



Do not smoke or let anyone smoke (including e-cigarettes) near you when you are on 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 near you when you are on your oxygen:** 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 which resembles smoke. There have been incidences where the e-cigarettes have exploded or ignited whilst being recharged or in an oxygen rich environment.

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- **Keep away from naked flames:** all oxygen equipment should be kept well away from naked flames such as candles, open fires and gas cookers.
- **Keep away from all sources of heat:** oxygen is not explosive but it will help fires to burn more fiercely. Ensure that your oxygen cylinders are kept away from fires, cookers and heaters etc. Baywater recommend that you keep all oxygen equipment at least 3 m (10 ft) from open fires and at least 1.5 m (5 ft) from closed fires.
- **Turn it off:** turn off the oxygen supply when not in use. When using your oxygen cylinders do not leave your mask or cannula in your lap or chair for any length of time. Oxygen may build up in the material and make it more flammable.

Further Information

If you have further questions or have a problem with your oxygen prescription, please contact the Department below for advice over the phone or an appointment to see a physiologist.

Respiratory Physiology Department

Telephone: 024 7696 6734

Email: uhc-tr.Oxygen-Service@nhs.net

You can contact Baywater on 0800 373 580 or visit their website www.baywater.co.uk for more 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.

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