

Respiratory physiology

Ambulatory oxygen therapy

Introduction

Many people with chronic lung diseases do not need extra oxygen therapy when sitting or walking short distances. But when you exercise, your body need more oxygen, which can cause oxygen levels to drop.

It may help to use supplementary oxygen when you are active. This is called Ambulatory Oxygen Therapy.

Ambulatory oxygen is given through portable equipment, like a small cylinder or concentrator, that most patients can carry. It is intended for patients who have low oxygen levels when they're active **and** want to join pulmonary rehabilitation, improve their ability to exercise, or do outdoor activities.

Ambulatory oxygen therapy can improve your health. It can improve quality of life and help people exercise better. People with COPD and interstitial lung diseases often find they can walk further when using this therapy.

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

When would you need an ambulatory oxygen assessment?

If you have chronic lung disease and your oxygen level drops to less than 90% when you exercise (but have normal oxygen levels at rest), you need an ambulatory oxygen assessment. Your doctor or specialist nurse can



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refer you to the Home Oxygen Team for this assessment.

Ambulatory oxygen must be carried and is meant for moderate activities like walking. It's not a good choice if you mostly stay at home, use a wheelchair when outside, use large walking aids or cannot carry the equipment yourself. It is not safe to have ambulatory oxygen if you smoke.

Oxygen therapy is only for patients who have low oxygen levels when they exercise. It is not used as a treatment for breathlessness or anxiety.

What happens if you are sent for an ambulatory assessment?

For your ambulatory oxygen assessment to be accurate, it is important to be free from chest infections and exacerbations for six weeks before your appointment. If you need to reschedule, please let the Oxygen Team know. You can take your inhalers as usual on the day of the test.

Wear comfortable clothing and shoes and try not to eat a big meal before you come.

If you have nail polish on, please remove it from at least one finger. We need to use a probe on your finger to measure your oxygen levels, and nail polish can affect the reading.

During the assessment, you will do a walking test while wearing the finger probe which measures your oxygen levels. We might ask you to do the test twice to see how much extra oxygen you need. We will ask how breathless you feel before and after walking, using a breathlessness scale.

What happens after your ambulatory assessment is complete?

If you need ambulatory oxygen, we will explain how much you need and when to use it. **You should only use this oxygen when you are active, like when you're walking, and not when you are resting. Using extra oxygen when you do not need it can be harmful.**

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If you are prescribed oxygen, we will schedule a follow-up appointment after 3 months. We will discuss your ambulatory oxygen prescription and find out how you are getting on with it. If all is well, we will see you once a year, or sooner if needed.

How will you get the oxygen prescription?

After your ambulatory assessment, and with your consent, the specialist nurse or physiologist will complete a Home Oxygen Order Form, (HOOF). This form is sent to a company called Baywater, which delivers oxygen in Coventry and Rugby. The oxygen is usually delivered to your home within three working days.

- Baywater will usually call you before their visit to let you know when they are coming.
- A Baywater engineer will come to your home to set up the oxygen and explain how to use all the equipment.
- You will be given an information pack by the engineer.

You can find out more about different types of oxygen equipment by requesting a leaflet from the Home Oxygen Team or visiting the Baywater website: <https://www.baywater.co.uk>

We can also discuss backpacks and trolley bags which can be used to carry oxygen equipment.

What happens if you have problems with your oxygen or the 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, contact Baywater by phone or order new cylinders on their website. They usually replace the cylinders the next working day. It is advisable to contact them before they are completely empty.

Your oxygen prescription is specifically designed for you, so please do not change the flow rate. If your oxygen is for using when walking and you feel like you need to use it when sitting down or resting, this could mean you are unwell, and we recommend seeking medical help.

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If you have any questions about your oxygen prescription, you can contact the Home Oxygen Team or the Respiratory Physiology Department. Contact details are given at the end of this leaflet.

What happens if you are going on holiday?

If you are going on holiday, please let Baywater know in advance. If you are travelling within Great Britain, they can contact local oxygen suppliers where you are visiting, so you can get your cylinders refilled and have support if your equipment stops working.

If you are travelling abroad, please contact the Home Oxygen Team for advice how to arrange oxygen while you are away.

If you plan to fly, please contact your respiratory consultant **before** booking your flight. You will need to be assessed to see if you need supplementary oxygen on the aeroplane.

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

Important safety tips for using oxygen

- **No Smoking: Do not smoke or allow anyone to smoke near you while using oxygen. Smoking can worsen your condition** and is dangerous because materials burn more strongly when in contact with oxygen.
- **E-Cigarettes: Do not use e-cigarettes or allow others to use them near you.** 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 cases where e-cigarettes have exploded or caught fire in an oxygen rich environment.
- **Stay away from flames:** Keep all oxygen equipment at least 10 feet (3 metres) away from flames, such as candles, open fires, and gas cookers.
- **Heat sources:** Oxygen is not explosive, but it can make fires burn more fiercely. Keep your oxygen cylinders away from fires, cookers, heaters, hair dryers, straighteners and such sources. Baywater recommends

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keeping oxygen equipment at least 5 feet (1.5 metres) from closed fires. Even a small spark ignite oxygen.

- **Avoid oil-based creams:** Lotions, creams, lip balms and skin products may contain paraffin or oil, as they can react with oxygen. Use water-based creams or lubricants instead.
- **Turn it off:** Turn off the oxygen supply when you are not using it. Don't leave your mask or tube (cannula) in your lap or chair for too long. Oxygen can build up in the material increase fire risk.

Other safety guidelines:

Do not share oxygen: Oxygen is a prescribed drug and should only be used by the person it is prescribed for. Sharing can lead to infection.

Flow rate: Do not increase the flow of oxygen. It is prescribed at a specific rate just for you.

Using too much or too little oxygen can be harmful and potentially fatal. If you experience any of the following symptoms please contact the HOS-AR team on 024 76966734:

- Feeling drowsy
- Feeling confused or muddled
- Regular headaches, especially in the morning.

Pressure sores: Oxygen tubing and oxygen masks can cause pressure sores on your ears, nose, or face. Check your skin where the oxygen tubing sits, as these areas can become sore or damaged.

Trip hazards: Oxygen tubing can be a trip hazard. Make sure it's not trapped under doors or furniture, as this can block the flow of oxygen. You can contact HOS-AR on 024 7696 6734 to arrange for the tubing to be fixed around the floor or skirting boards. This prevents the risk of falls.

Cleaning: Clean your nasal cannula daily with a disinfectant wipe or a warm soapy cloth. Do not immerse into water. Discard the nasal cannula after any infections or if it becomes hard or discoloured.

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Clean the removable filter found at the back of the static concentrator. Wash the filter once a week using warm, soapy water and leave to air dry.

Travelling with oxygen cylinders: When travelling with oxygen cylinders, secure them properly to prevent injuries if the vehicle suddenly stops. Display a carrying oxygen sticker **when you are travelling with oxygen.**

Insurance: Inform your home and car insurance companies about your oxygen equipment. This should not increase your premium but should make sure the cost of medical equipment is covered.

Electricity supplier: Tell your electricity supplier you have an oxygen concentrator. They can add you to their priority list in case of power failure.

Access for emergency services: Allow the fire service access to your property when requested.

Equipment collection: Allow oxygen equipment to be collected from your home if treatment is no longer needed.

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

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.

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The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

Did we get it right?

We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.

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