



**University Hospitals Birmingham**  
NHS Foundation Trust



# Ambulatory oxygen

**Building healthier lives**

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[www.uhb.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets.htm](http://www.uhb.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets.htm)

## What is it?

Ambulatory oxygen is a portable treatment to be used on exertion when walking or carrying out any physical activity. It is usually supplied as cylinders which can either be carried in the back pack supplied, wheeled on a small trolley or carried by someone else with you. It can also be provided by portable oxygen concentrators or in liquid form in portable flasks. Oxygen tubing is attached to the equipment. The tubing has two prongs at the end (nasal cannulae) which fit one up each nostril. They stay on by hooking over the ears and secure gently under the chin. You can also have oxygen through a special clear mask which fits over the nose and mouth. The oxygen team will decide which equipment is best for your needs.

## What does it do?

It supplies the body with extra oxygen when it is working at its hardest when you are moving about. Oxygen is the fuel your muscles use when they are working. If your lungs are damaged they may not be able to give the amount of oxygen required by your body and it may be one of the reasons you feel breathless when walking about.

## When should I use it?

Ambulatory oxygen should only be used when you are moving about. This is when it will work best by giving the body oxygen when it needs it. It should not be used when sat still as the body does not need as much oxygen when at rest and over-using oxygen could cause harm in some people.

## How do I use it?

The company supplying the equipment will show you how to use it, and give you safety information for proper use and storage.

## How long does it last for?

How long the oxygen lasts for depends on the flow of oxygen and the equipment type you are prescribed. Devices called conservers can be added to certain types of equipment (usually cylinders) which make them last longer.

The oxygen team will assess your suitability for a conserver as they are only prescribed with nasal cannulae for people who nose breathe.

## What happens when I run out?

When the equipment is first delivered the supply company will leave you an information pack with a list of contact numbers. When you are near to needing new cylinders please call the company to arrange delivery of new ones. This will not be the case with the concentrators as they work differently and do not run out. Liquid oxygen flasks are filled from a device known as a dewar. The dewar will be replaced on a fortnightly basis. All oxygen equipment does require servicing; the supply company will arrange and carry this out. They will contact you to be done at your convenience.

## Are there any side effects?

Some people may be unsuitable for oxygen (as shown during assessment) and therefore will not be prescribed the therapy. When using oxygen, some nasal dryness may be experienced due to the nasal cannulae, but this can be easily treated with water based lubricants. Oil based products (like Vaseline) should not be used as it is unsuitable for use with oxygen.

## Are there any risks?

Oxygen is highly flammable, it is essential you do not smoke whilst using home oxygen therapy. Other people should refrain from smoking near you also when using oxygen. This could cause significant harm (usually burns) to you and those in your household. The benefits of oxygen over the risks of continuing

smoking will have been discussed with your doctor or nurse specialist before oxygen is prescribed. If you do smoke against safety and or medical advice, your oxygen may be removed.

The oxygen equipment will be positioned in a safe place within your home by the oxygen suppliers. They will explain fully how to use your oxygen safely as there are a few simple precautions you will need to follow. These include not using a gas cooker or any appliance with naked flames whilst wearing your oxygen.

West Midlands Fire Service provides safety checks and advice on the placement of smoke alarms and it is recommended that you take up this service. If the supply company have any concerns about the suitability of your home for the oxygen equipment, they will contact the fire service safety advisor.

## Follow-up

Once prescribed ambulatory oxygen, you will be seen by the QEHB oxygen team on a regular basis to review how you are getting on with your treatment and make any changes required.

## Useful contacts

### Landline numbers

0121 371 3870

0121 371 3889

0121 371 3873

0121 371 3871

### Mobile numbers

07717 850 041

07785 700 499

07920 846 402

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