



University Hospitals Birmingham
NHS Foundation Trust



Oxygen therapy for palliative care

Building healthier lives

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www.uhb.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets.htm

The team looking after you and your condition have decided oxygen therapy may be of benefit to manage your symptoms.

What is oxygen therapy?

Oxygen therapy involves receiving extra oxygen to help you breathe. This means we will give you extra oxygen, usually via the nose or nose and mouth. This is supplied from specialised equipment which can be either a static concentrator or cylinder.

Oxygen equipment

Oxygen concentrator: An oxygen concentrator can be used to produce the extra oxygen you require. This is a box approximately 2 feet wide by 2.5 feet tall which plugs into an electricity wall socket. It takes oxygen from the air, filters and concentrates it. This means it never runs out of oxygen.

The cost of running the concentrator will be paid by the NHS either directly to you or to the electricity company; the latter option however takes much longer.

Oxygen cylinders are specialised round metal containers, which stand up on a flat bottom. They contain a fixed amount of oxygen and are replaced when the oxygen runs out. You are attached to the equipment by a long flexible plastic tube which 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 if I need to get out and about?

Portable equipment can be prescribed allowing you to use oxygen therapy outside the home. This can be prescribed by QEHB oxygen team. Please contact us if this is required.

How long will I use the oxygen therapy for each day?

Oxygen therapy can be used in short bursts for minutes or for longer periods of hours. When you are prescribed oxygen the team will tell you how to use it and how long for.

Are there any side effects?

Some people may be unsuitable for oxygen (as shown during assessment) and therefore it will not be prescribed, however other treatments may be more suitable and will be discussed with you if this is the case. These include fan therapy, relaxation breathing techniques and medication.

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.

Occasionally people may develop problems associated with retaining the waste gas carbon dioxide whilst using oxygen. Symptoms of this include headaches in the morning after sleeping with oxygen on or regular headaches when using oxygen, which you did not have before starting oxygen therapy.

Other signs are unexplained confusion and/or drowsiness. Please contact a member of the team on the numbers provided at the end of this leaflet if you experience any symptoms.

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.

A back-up cylinder is provided (in case of a power failure). This is not portable and should not be moved from the location it is placed in by the supply company.

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.

A member of the oxygen team will go through all the safety advice with you including all the 'do's and don'ts'. This will be documented on a disclaimer which you will need to sign before the therapy is prescribed.

Follow-up, advice and support

Once prescribed oxygen you may or may not have regular follow-up appointments, depending on your condition and circumstances. However, you are welcome to contact a member of the oxygen team with any concerns you have about your oxygen therapy.

Contact details

Respiratory oxygen nurses:

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



The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk/health-talks.htm or call 0121 371 4323.

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