

Oxygen therapy for cluster headaches

Cluster headaches

Cluster headaches are severe, usually one sided head pain, which appear in bouts or clusters. Those affected usually get one to three of these attacks every day, for several weeks or months, before they stop. It may be months or years before the headache attacks start again.

Is there any treatment?

Treatment is usually in the form of medication; however, NICE (National Institute of Health and Care Excellence) recommends oxygen for the acute treatment of Cluster Headaches. Your treatment plan is usually worked out by your specialist and may involve one or both of the above. Generally the treatments work by reducing the blood supply to the brain by narrowing the blood vessels. This provides safe and effective pain relief.

Oxygen therapy for cluster headaches

Your specialist will prescribe oxygen for your headaches if it is appropriate. There is good evidence it is helpful in relieving the symptoms. This generally involves breathing 100% oxygen through a special mask (non-rebreather) or demand valve, attached to an oxygen cylinder usually for 10-20 minutes. These are static devices and remain in the home; however more portable cylinders (ambulatory) can be provided for use outside the home if required. You will be given instructions on how and when to use your oxygen effectively and whether a mask or demand valve is suitable for you, enabling you to use your oxygen effectively. Other devices can be purchased from the charity Ouch (UK).

If the therapy is working and you require more portable cylinders to take out of the house. Please contact the oxygen nurses (under useful contacts) to organise this.

Are there any risks?

Some people may be unsuitable for oxygen therapy for treatment of their cluster headaches and as such it will not be prescribed. It is generally inappropriate for those with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Safety considerations for oxygen use

Oxygen is highly flammable therefore in order to use and store your oxygen safely you must follow the advice and guidance given by the supplier.

The company supplying the oxygen will ensure the oxygen equipment is positioned in a safe place within your home and will fully explain how to use your oxygen safely.

For safety:

- It is essential that you do not smoke while using home oxygen therapy
- Other people should also refrain from smoking near you when using oxygen. This could cause significant harm (usually burns) to you and those in your household
- Do not use 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.

Useful contacts

Lung Function and Sleep Administration Team:

0121 371 3870

Home Oxygen Service and Review Team

0121 371 3889

0121 371 3873

0121 371 3871

0121 371 8172

Website: www.ouchuk.org

Email: Info@ouchuk.org

Helpline OUCH UK: 0800 6696 824

Lung Function and Sleep

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham

Mindelsohn Way, Edgbaston

Birmingham, B15 2GW

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