

Ambulatory oxygen

What is it?

Ambulatory or portable oxygen is a treatment to be used when walking or carrying out any physical activity. It is usually supplied in a cylinder that can either be carried in the bag supplied, wheeled on a small trolley or carried by someone else with you. Portable oxygen can also be delivered by portable oxygen concentrators or in liquid form in portable containers or flasks. Oxygen tubing is attached to the equipment, which is connected to either nasal cannula or a facemask. A nasal cannula has two prongs that sit just inside your nose and deliver oxygen directly into your nostrils. They stay on by hooking over your ears and are secured under your chin. The facemask fits over your nose and mouth and is held in place by an elastic strap. The Home Oxygen Team will decide which equipment is most suitable for your needs.

What does it do?

Oxygen is the fuel your muscles use when they are working. If your lungs and/or heart are damaged, they may not be able to provide your body with the amount of oxygen required, particularly when you are moving about. If this is the case, ambulatory or portable oxygen can be helpful to increase the level of oxygen in your blood when you are exerting yourself. Oxygen will not stop you being breathless. It helps your body to work more efficiently and enables you to do more before you need to rest.

When should I use it?

Ambulatory oxygen should only be used when you are active or on the go. There is no value in putting it on after the activity as your muscles need the extra oxygen while you are doing the task. You will not feel a 'need' to use it, but you should use it whenever you are active.

How do I use it?

The Home Oxygen Team will talk you through how to use it and they will provide you with safety information for proper use and storage.

How long does it last for?

How long the oxygen lasts for depends on the flow rate of oxygen prescribed and the equipment type you use. Devices called conservers can be added to certain types of equipment (usually cylinders), which make them last longer. Most electric devices (portable concentrators) have conservers built into them. The Home Oxygen Team may assess your suitability for a conserver device, as they can only be used with nasal cannula and for people who breathe through their nose.

What happens when I run out?

When your equipment is first delivered, the supply company will leave you an information pack with a list of contact numbers. When you are close to requiring new cylinders, please call the company to arrange delivery of new ones. They will normally replace your cylinders the next working day. This will not be the case with portable oxygen concentrators as they make oxygen and do not run out. However, you will need to remember to keep the battery charged. Liquid oxygen flasks are filled from a device known as a dewar. A dewar is a larger insulated container used for storing your liquid oxygen. The dewar is usually replaced on a fortnightly basis. All oxygen equipment requires servicing; the supply company will arrange and carry this out. They will contact you to organise a convenient time for this to take place.

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, nasal dryness may be experienced due to the nasal cannula, but this can be easily treated with water-based lubricants (such as KY Jelly).

Oil-based products (like Vaseline) must be avoided, as they are unsuitable for use with oxygen.

Are there any risks?

Oxygen makes things burn much more fiercely; therefore, it is essential you **do not smoke** or use an electronic vape device whilst using home oxygen therapy. Other people should refrain from smoking or vaping near you 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 to smoke will have been discussed with you by the Home Oxygen Team before oxygen is prescribed. If you do smoke against safety and/or medical advice, your oxygen may be removed.

The home oxygen suppliers will advise you about where to store your portable oxygen equipment. 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, log burner, open fire, or any appliance with naked flames, whilst wearing your oxygen and for a period of time after using your oxygen. You must also not store oxygen equipment in the same room as these appliances.

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

If you are prescribed ambulatory oxygen, you will be reviewed by the Home Oxygen Team after 3 months to assess how you are getting on with your treatment and to make any changes required. Following this appointment, if all is well, we will see you once a year, or sooner if needed.

Useful contacts

Lung Function and Sleep Team
0121 424 7229

Respiratory Nurse Specialist Team
0121 424 7503

Department address and contact information:

Lung Function and Sleep
Good Hope Hospital
Rectory Road, Sutton Coldfield
Birmingham, B75 7RR
Telephone: 0121 424 7229

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