

Home oxygen therapy

What is it?

Long-term oxygen therapy (referred to as LTOT) is a treatment option for people with chronic lung conditions. When the lungs are affected by disease it can mean they are less able to transfer oxygen from the air to the blood in the body, where it is needed for everyday functioning. This may produce symptoms of shortness of breath whilst performing daily tasks, such as washing, dressing or climbing the stairs for example. However, oxygen is not a treatment for breathlessness and is only effective if your blood oxygen levels are low.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and bronchiectasis are examples of diseases where home oxygen therapy may be required. There are however many more for which it is beneficial.

How do we know if you need it?

You may be referred by your GP or consultant to a specialised unit such as the lung function and sleep department to assess your needs for the therapy. Depending upon where you live, the oxygen clinic is based at Good Hope Hospital, or Samuel Johnson Hospital in Lichfield, or Sir Robert Peel Hospital in Tamworth.

Assessment usually requires two visits to the unit when your condition is stable. On both occasions, a blood sample will be taken and fed into a specialised machine. This tells us what the oxygen levels are in your blood and whether they are at a level that would benefit from home oxygen. If your readings are consistently low and below a certain reading, you are likely to benefit from the therapy. The level of oxygen you require will be assessed during your second visit, where we will put you on oxygen for a period and measure your blood oxygen levels again. It can however take longer if a different level of oxygen is required.

Home oxygen therapy is not suitable for all patients with lung conditions, and we will know if this is the case after your assessment. You may be prescribed oxygen on discharge from hospital. This is sometimes a temporary measure and may not be needed long-term. Depending upon where you live, your assessment and follow up will take place at Good Hope Hospital, or Samuel Johnson Hospital in Lichfield, or Sir Robert Peel Hospital in Tamworth.

What equipment is used to give the oxygen?

A machine called an oxygen concentrator will be used to administer the extra oxygen you require. This is an electrical device approximately 2 feet wide and 2.5 feet tall that plugs in to a standard household plug socket. It filters and concentrates oxygen from room air. You are attached to this concentrator by a long, flexible plastic tube which has two prongs at the end (nasal cannula), which fit one up each nostril. They remain in place by hooking over the ears and secure gently under the chin. Oxygen masks are also available.

You can choose to have oxygen piped throughout your home, so it is conveniently available in every room without moving the concentrator. It is also possible for enough tubing to be installed to make garden areas accessible. You will be given supplies of spare oxygen tubing and nasal cannulas and will be advised how often to change these.

My electricity bills will increase whilst using oxygen, do I have to pay this extra cost?

The extra electricity used to run your concentrator will be reimbursed by the home oxygen equipment provider. There is a meter in the oxygen concentrator from which a reading is taken twice a year. Payments can be made automatically into your bank account if this is more convenient for you.

How many hours a day do I have to use oxygen for?

Oxygen therapy is most effective when used for 15 or more hours each day. This can include using the oxygen at night, which many people find an easy way to achieve the hours recommended.

Some people may benefit from ambulatory or portable oxygen to use when you are outside the home. There are several ways in which this can be delivered, and the Oxygen Team will assess the most suitable for you.

How do I get out and about if prescribed long-term oxygen therapy?

Portable equipment can be prescribed after an assessment in the Lung Function and Sleep department. This is organised following a referral from a healthcare professional. Portable equipment allows you to carry on as usual with your activities without being tied to the home for your oxygen supply.

What happens if I need home oxygen therapy?

The lung function and sleep department will organise the installation of the equipment needed. With your consent, we will pass on your details to the company working with the NHS in the West Midlands region to supply oxygen therapy. They will call you and arrange to supply and install the equipment at your convenience. They will also instruct you how to use the therapy and give you helpline numbers if you require advice or assistance.

Can I go on holiday if I have been prescribed long-term oxygen therapy?

Arrangements can be made quite easily to have oxygen supplied anywhere in the UK. It is also possible to arrange oxygen for most worldwide destinations; however, this may come at an extra cost that you will be responsible for. You will also need to make your own arrangements for oxygen outside the UK as the Oxygen Team cannot do this for you.

Will I always need oxygen and what if the oxygen level I am prescribed needs changing?

Once oxygen therapy has been prescribed, we will follow-up with you on your therapy on a regular basis.

Your follow up may include a home visit if this is part of your local service. Your oxygen requirements will be reviewed at least annually but may be more frequently. During this visit we will check your oxygen levels to make sure the prescription is still correct. Occasionally during these visits, we may find you no longer need oxygen. If so, we will discuss this with you and arrange removal of the equipment.

What are the benefits?

Long-term oxygen therapy may reduce the symptoms of lung disease, including shortness of breath and fatigue. It may also improve your chance of survival and reduce complications that may occur because of lung disease

Are there any side effects?

Oxygen therapy may be unsuitable for some people, (as shown during assessment) and therefore will not be prescribed the therapy. When using oxygen, some nasal dryness may occur due to the nasal cannula, but this can be easily treated with water-based lubricants which can be purchased over the counter or prescribed by your GP. Oil-based products (like Vaseline) should not be used as they are 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 a fire hazard and encourages things to burn more fiercely. Therefore, it is essential that you do not smoke, vape or use e-cigarettes whilst using home oxygen therapy. Other people should refrain from smoking or use e-cigarettes near you when you are using oxygen. This could cause significant harm (usually burns) to you and those in your household. You will discuss the benefits of oxygen over the risks of continuing smoking with your doctor or nurse before oxygen is prescribed.

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 having your oxygen. If you continue to smoke against medical advice or there is evidence that you are not adhering to smoking safety advice, your oxygen may be removed. 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 advises on the placement of smoke alarms. It is recommended that you use 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 the dos and don'ts. This will be formally documented and require your signature.

Equipment servicing

Your oxygen concentrator will be regularly serviced and safety checked. You will be shown how to change the filters in the machine. These help filter the oxygen supply you breathe. They will also regularly check and change the back-up cylinder if necessary.

What if I don't want oxygen therapy?

You can choose whether you wish to have the therapy.

If you feel it is not something you would like to have at present, we can continue to monitor you. Some people may have low blood oxygen levels but may not be particularly breathless so feel less inclined towards the treatment.

Are there any alternatives to oxygen therapy?

There are no alternative treatments to increase your blood oxygen levels. However, when you attend the department, your medications will be reviewed to ensure you are receiving the optimum or best medications for your condition. If we think your medication could be improved, a referral to a respiratory consultant will be arranged to address this. In some cases, a change in medication can improve your oxygen levels.

Additional information

Important:

Oxygen is a prescribed drug - do not change or adjust the setting on your oxygen without talking to the Oxygen Team first. Turning the flow rate up or down could put you in danger. If you have small children in the home, consider having your oxygen machine 'locked' to prevent accidental changes

Care of equipment:

You should clean you face mask or nasal cannula (prongs) with soap and water daily. The tube that connects them to your machine or cylinder does not require cleaning. Always follow your oxygen providers' instructions on caring for your equipment.

Replace the prongs every two to four weeks and your mask every three months. If you have a cold or a chest infection, change them when your symptoms pass. Your home oxygen provider will supply you with spares.

If the skin behind your ears becomes sore (this is more common in patients who wear glasses or hearing aids) you can ask your home oxygen provider to supply you with some soft wraps to go around the oxygen tubing and protect your skin.

After starting oxygen therapy, the team will advise you when you will be reviewed again. If you have any queries with regards to your oxygen requirements, equipment or follow up, contact numbers are listed below.

When transporting portable oxygen cylinders in your vehicle, you must ensure that the oxygen cylinder is secured during all journeys, either in the boot of the car or on the back seat with a secure fastening. You may need to purchase elastic luggage straps to secure the cylinders safely when transporting them in your vehicle.

Most companies will not alter your insurance premium, however, if you do not inform your insurer that you transport oxygen cylinders in your vehicle, it may jeopardise any claims that you make.

Contact details:

For Good Hope Hospital:

The Home Oxygen Team based at Good Hope Hospital are available as follows:

Monday–Friday, 09:00–17:00

For queries about your oxygen clinic appointment, contact the Oxygen Administrator on:
0121 424 7229

For queries about your home oxygen prescription contact the Lung Function and Sleep Department: **0121 424 7229**

For queries about your breathing problems, medication or your oxygen, please contact the Respiratory Nurse Specialists on: 0121 424 7503

There is an answerphone service for all services, so if no-one is free to take your call, please leave a message with your name and a daytime contact telephone number.

For SES:

The South Staffs Home Oxygen Team are based at Good Hope Hospital and available as follows:

Monday–Friday, 09:00–17:00

For queries about your oxygen clinic appointment, contact the Oxygen Administrator on:
0121 424 7872

For queries about your home oxygen prescription contact the Lung Function and Sleep Department on: **0121 424 7229**

For queries about your breathing problems, medication or your oxygen, then please contact the Respiratory Nurse Specialists on: **0121 424 7503**

There is an answerphone service for all services, so if no one is free to take your call, please leave a message with your name and a daytime contact telephone number.

Useful websites

NHS Home oxygen website

www.homeoxygen.nhs.uk/1.php

British Lung Foundation

www.lunguk.org Phone number: 0207 688 5555

Department address and contact information:

Lung Function and Sleep Department

Good Hope Hospital Rectory Road,
Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, B75 7RR
Telephone: **0121 424 7229**

Accessibility

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