

Oxygen therapy at home

Long term prescription at least 16 hours/day



Patient/Carer Information

Community Health Service

Frequently asked questions

What is my home oxygen prescription?

_____ Litres of oxygen for at least _____ hours each day.

Additional instructions: _____

Why am I on home oxygen?

You are on home oxygen because your body has persistently low oxygen levels. The aim of oxygen treatment is to improve this.

Persistently low levels of oxygen in the blood can cause the blood vessels in the lungs to narrow. The heart becomes less efficient as it tries to pump blood through the narrowed vessels.

The body responds to persistently low levels of oxygen by increasing the number of red blood cells. The red blood cells contain haemoglobin. This is a protein that carries oxygen around the body. This increase in red blood cells can slow down the flow of blood around the body.

The aim of long term oxygen therapy is to increase life expectancy and preserve the function of the heart and other organs.

Why at least 16 hours every 24 hours?

The aim of home oxygen is to bring your oxygen levels up to normal for most of the time. Research has shown that at least 16 hours a day of oxygen is needed. The improvement will occur over weeks, months and years.

The amount of oxygen prescribed is decided by doing a special blood test called blood gases. It is important that you **never** increase your oxygen dose unless you are asked to do so by a medical doctor or the Respiratory Service.

What times should the oxygen be on and does it need to be given in one block or hours?

We recommend that a large block of 12-14 hours is completed continuously, this includes NIGHT time.

Two examples would be:

7.00pm – 9.00am = 14 hours

11.00am – 3.00pm = 4 hours

Total 18 hours

OR

9.00pm – 9.00am = 12 hours

2.00pm – 6.00pm = 4 hours

Total 16 hours

These hours are worked out by each individual and will depend on your normal level of activity and can be varied day to day. A good rule is if you are resting at home you should have your oxygen on. It may take you several weeks to adjust to being on oxygen.

Important: make the most out of life by keeping as active as possible. Research has shown that regular exercise or just simply walking helps ease the feeling of shortness of breath so you can manage day to day activities better. It can also help prevent a flare up of your lung condition, or speed up your recovery.

Remember it is a minimum of 16 hours

What are the side effects of oxygen?

You may have some discomfort and nasal dryness wearing nasal tubing from continual flow of oxygen. A water based lubricant from your local pharmacy e.g. Orabase Paste (usually used for sore gums) applied 4 times a day can help prevent and eases nasal dryness and pain. Oil based products (e.g. Vaseline) should not be used as they are unsuitable for use with oxygen.

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Sometimes people develop problems associated with retaining a waste gas called carbon dioxide (CO₂) whilst using oxygen. Symptoms 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 include unexplained confusion and/or drowsiness. Please contact your family doctor (GP) if you have any symptoms.

Can I go without home oxygen when I go out?

Yes, this is safe. It is important to maintain regular activity and social interaction. Occasionally using less than 16 hours a day for the purpose of getting out is acceptable.

Is home oxygen given for breathlessness?

No, it is not given for breathlessness. Breathlessness has many causes but not low oxygen levels. A lung condition that causes low levels of oxygen can also cause breathlessness.

What are the danger issues with oxygen?

Oxygen is highly flammable therefore **NO SMOKING** because of the increased risk of fire/explosion. Smoking also reduces the effectiveness of oxygen and causes damage to the oxygen machine. Oxygen will not be prescribed for people who continue to smoke. Those that are smoking at the time of their assessment must prove they have been smoke free for at least 4 weeks before home oxygen is reconsidered as part of their treatment plan. Oxygen therapy will be removed from the home immediately if there is evidence of continued smoking.

Please refer to “A Guide to Home Oxygen Therapy – Equipment Management and Safety” for more information on “Safe and Effective Use of Oxygen”

Will I always be on home oxygen?

Home oxygen is prescribed for low oxygen levels due to long term lung conditions. It is likely to continue as long as the lung condition continues.

Ongoing Follow up:

The District Nursing Team will visit you at home regularly. Usually your GP will continue to monitor

your progress on home oxygen, as they do for your other medicines. If he/she has any concerns he/she will contact or refer you to the Respiratory Clinic for a further Specialist Assessment. Less often, people on oxygen treatment are seen regularly in the Respiratory Clinic. This is due to the nature of their lung condition rather than the need for treatment including oxygen.

The oxygen concentrator has alarmed

- Check there has not been a power cut.
- Check the machine has not come unplugged at the wall or at the back of the machine.
- Check that the oxygen tubing is not blocked or kinked.
- Check that the machine is not overheated. Some rooms are too hot for the machine.
- Please refer to “A Guide to Home Oxygen Therapy – Equipment management and Safety” for information on “Action plan for equipment breakdown”
- Remember you are safe without supplementary oxygen as the benefits gained are long term.

Oxygen concentrator maintenance

- Wash the filters every week. You will have 2 filters, wash in warm soapy water and dry in an airing cupboard. Drying time is reduced by rolling the filters in a clean tea towel to squeeze out the water.
- Wipe machine down with damp cloth weekly.

Contact us

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