

# Home oxygen therapy

Information and advice for patients

## *Community Respiratory Service*

### **What is home oxygen therapy?**

Home oxygen therapy is where you are given oxygen treatment at home. You may need this because of a problem with your heart or lungs which is preventing your body from getting the amount of oxygen it needs.

All the equipment you need for home oxygen therapy will be provided by a local oxygen provider who will deliver it to your home. They will also give you an information booklet with details of their service and safety using oxygen at home.

### **What are the benefits of home oxygen therapy?**

Oxygen therapy increases the amount of oxygen you breathe in, so improves the amount of oxygen the cells in your body receive. This prevents further damage to your organs because they are getting the amount of oxygen they need to work properly.

Oxygen therapy can help you to sleep better, feel less irritable, improve your memory, give you more energy, be able to exercise more and sometimes feel less short of breath. Having oxygen at home means you may also spend fewer days in hospital.

### **What are the risks of home oxygen therapy?**

#### **Not using the correct amount of oxygen**

Having too little or too much oxygen can be harmful to you so it is important that you never alter the oxygen flow rate, and make sure you attend all your scheduled oxygen appointments so we can monitor your levels.

Having too much oxygen can cause your carbon dioxide (waste gas your body produces and is breathed out) levels to increase. This can cause your symptoms to become worse and can be harmful to your body. It can also cause the following symptoms:

- Drowsiness and/or lethargy
- Pounding headaches (usually early morning on waking)
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Flushed face and warm to touch

If you notice any of these symptoms, please contact the Community Respiratory Service as you may need to be re-assessed urgently.

#### **Nose problems**

When you first start using oxygen you may experience nose bleeds which should stop as your nose becomes used to it; if they persist please contact your GP.

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You may also experience some nasal congestion which can be treated with medicines from your pharmacy, and a dry or sore nose which can be relieved by applying a water-based gel such as K-Y Jelly inside the nose; don't use petroleum based substances such as Vaseline, as this is flammable.

### **Sore ears**

The tubing that holds the mask or nasal prongs in place can sometimes cause your ears to become sore. To prevent or relieve this wrap soft material such as cotton wool around the part of the tubing that sits on your ears. Also contact your local oxygen supplier, as they may be able to send you soft covers to apply to the tubing.

### **Fire**

Using oxygen increases the risk of fire so it is very important that you do not smoke, let anyone else smoke or have an open flame nearby when you are using oxygen therapy. Your local oxygen provider will give you an information leaflet with more detail about using oxygen safely at home. You are also advised to book a free home fire safety check with your local fire service who can also provide you with free smoke alarms if needed (contact number on back page).

### **Are there any alternative treatments?**

Your doctor/nurse have assessed you and decided that home oxygen therapy is the most suitable treatment for you. There may be alternative treatment options for you but this will depend on your condition and you can discuss this with your doctor.

### **What are the risks of declining home oxygen therapy?**

If you decide not to use oxygen at home, over time you may develop problems with some of your organs because they cannot get the amount of oxygen they need to work properly. The symptoms you have been experiencing will not improve and you may also develop other symptoms such as decreased ability to exercise, shortness of breath, fatigue and/or occasional disorientation or memory loss.

### **How is oxygen therapy given?**

You will be advised on how many hours you need to use the oxygen for by the clinician you see in oxygen clinic. The type of oxygen, amount of oxygen you need and how long to use it for, is determined by either a special blood test and/or a walk assessment. You can be given oxygen therapy either through an oxygen concentrator, an ambulatory oxygen cylinder or both.

### **Oxygen concentrator**

An oxygen concentrator is an electrically operated device that draws in room air, separates the oxygen from the other gases in the air and filters any bacteria out of the air. It then delivers the oxygen through tubing to a mask or prongs in your nose.

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Using an oxygen concentrator should not stop you from moving about your house. Your local oxygen supplier will provide you with enough tubing to safely move about your home whilst using your oxygen. Otherwise you can have the tubing plumbed in around the home, which reduces the risk of tripping over the tubing. We highly recommend you have the tubing plumbed in as this reduces the risk of tripping over the tubing and potentially injuring yourself. If you would like these adjustments to your tubing, please contact your oxygen supplier.

You will be reimbursed for the cost of the electricity used to power your oxygen concentrator (the oxygen supplier will give you information on this) and will also be given a back-up oxygen cylinder to use in case of a problem with your electricity supply.

### **Ambulatory device**

An ambulatory (mobile) oxygen device may be a small cylinder, portable oxygen machine or liquid oxygen device which is for use during activities that make you the most breathless and tired, not when you are resting. You will have had a walk test at the oxygen clinic to see how much oxygen you need when walking.

Your oxygen supplier will supply the equipment you need for this and you should contact them when the oxygen cylinder needs changing.

### **How long will I need home oxygen therapy for?**

If you are having oxygen therapy because you have a long-term condition you will need to use the oxygen permanently. If you are having oxygen for a short-term illness you may not need it once you have recovered. You will be given follow-up appointments to check that the amount of oxygen you are receiving is correct.

### **How do I know if I am receiving enough oxygen?**

The only way to know that you are receiving enough oxygen is by having a specialist oxygen assessment. You will not be able to know any other way because breathlessness is not related to how good your oxygen levels are; you can be severely breathless and have good oxygen levels or you can be mildly breathless with low oxygen levels.

If you think you are not getting enough oxygen please contact the Community Respiratory Service to discuss this.

### **Going on holiday**

If you are going on holiday in this country, you can order a supply of oxygen to take with you by contacting your oxygen supplier. You will need to tell them your holiday dates and the address, telephone number and contact name for the place you will be staying. Your oxygen will be delivered to where you are staying on the day you arrive and will be taken away on the day you leave.

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If you are going abroad, you can organise a supply of oxygen by contacting your oxygen supplier who will advise you of what to do, however please be aware that travelling abroad with oxygen is not a free service.

### Contact details

#### Community Respiratory Service

0121 612 2007

Monday – Friday, 8am – 8pm

Saturday & Sunday, 8.30am – 4.30pm

#### Baywater Healthcare (oxygen supplier)

0800 373 580

Monday – Friday, 8am – 5pm

Only urgent calls outside these hours.

#### West Midlands Fire Service

0800 389 5525

### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- British Thoracic Society Emergency Oxygen Guideline Group, 'Guideline for emergency oxygen use in adult patients', October 2008

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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