



Respiratory Department

Palliative Oxygen Therapy at Home

Why have I been given oxygen?

The team who are looking after you have decided that oxygen therapy might be of benefit to you.

Oxygen is vital for our bodies and having low oxygen levels can make you feel unwell.

However, oxygen is not very successful at treating the feeling of breathlessness, and breathlessness does not always mean your oxygen levels are low.

Home oxygen must be prescribed by a specialist oxygen team. It is given via specific oxygen equipment. You may be given oxygen either by an oxygen concentrator or oxygen cylinders.

An oxygen concentrator is a machine that draws in room air and filters it to give you the correct amount of oxygen according to your prescription. This means you will never run out of oxygen. It is the size of a suitcase and is plugged in to an electric socket. Do not worry about the electricity cost - this will be funded by the NHS.

Oxygen cylinders are specialised round, metal containers, which contain compressed gas. They contain a fixed amount of oxygen which can be replaced when they run out.

A company called Air Liquide will come and install all the oxygen equipment into your home and show you how to use it.

The oxygen can be delivered via a nasal cannula (two prongs which go up your nose). These can be hooked over both ears and are gently secured under your chin. You may also be given a clear mask which fits over your mouth and nose and can be adjusted for comfort.

Your oxygen specialist will prescribe the equipment that is best for your needs.

How much oxygen do I need?

This can vary and you will be guided by your oxygen specialist. Some people use it for short periods of time, whilst others use it 24 hours a day. You might find it helpful to use your oxygen when you feel breathless, especially at times of exertion such as washing, dressing and climbing the stairs.

The oxygen flow rate that you are prescribed can also vary and again, you will be guided by your specialist. He/she will let you know which setting your equipment should be on and you **must never** change the setting without speaking to your oxygen specialist first.

Can oxygen be harmful?

Some people may be unsuitable for oxygen, but this would have been identified before the oxygen is prescribed. That is why it is very important you **do not** adjust your flow rate without speaking to your oxygen specialist beforehand. Generally, oxygen is safe when it is used properly.

Sometimes when using oxygen, nasal dryness may occur. This can be treated with water-based lubricants, which your GP can prescribe, or you can get at a pharmacy. You should **NEVER** use any oil/petroleum-based products such as Vaseline.

How to care for your oxygen equipment

Check your nasal cannula or mask frequently to ensure that the tips are not blocked. If required, you can wipe with a damp cloth.

Change your nasal cannula or mask at least every six weeks. If you have had a chest infection you should change them straight after you are better. If you require more nasal cannula or masks, just phone Air Liquide who will provide you with more.

Dust your concentrator every week with a damp cloth; make sure it has been turned off and the power lead has been unplugged first.

The air filter at the back of the concentrator must be cleaned weekly. Simply remove the filter and replace it with your spare one. Wash the old filter in hot soapy water, rinse thoroughly and allow it to dry naturally. If you do not have a spare filter, contact Air Liquide directly and they will provide you with one.

Oxygen Safety

When used correctly oxygen is safe, but you do need to follow some basic safety advice:

- Do not smoke or let anyone else smoke near you when you are using your oxygen. Smoking will aggravate your condition and is dangerous when using oxygen. Materials burn more vigorously when in contact with oxygen than with air.
- Do not use e-cigarettes or let anyone else use them near you either. This includes reusable and disposable electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes), cigars, pipes and similar battery- powered tobacco replacement products which use a heating element (atomiser) to produce a vapour resembling smoke. **There have been incidents where the e-cigarettes have exploded or ignited whilst being recharged or in an oxygen-rich environment.**
- Keep away from naked flames such as open fires, gas cookers, birthday or scented candles and from any heaters.

- Turn off the oxygen when it is not in use. Oxygen can build up in material, making it more flammable.
- If you are given an oxygen concentrator, it is important to inform your electricity provider as they will add you to their priority list in case there is a power cut. You should also update your insurance company although it should not affect your premium.

A member of the team will call you at home 24 hours after commencing on the home oxygen.

Contact Numbers:

We hope that you have found this information useful. If you have any questions or are worried about anything, please speak to the following Dorset County Hospital Staff:

Dorset Adult Integrated Respiratory Service (DAIRS): 01305 253131

Nick Nadaf, Respiratory Nurse Practitioner or
Anita Burnham, Respiratory Clinical Nurse Specialist: 01305 254569/01305 254025
Department of Respiratory Medicine, based at Dorset County Hospital
Service hours: Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm

Other useful contact details:

Air Liquide:	0808 1439999
Air Liquide Rebate Team:	0800 781 9939
Fire Service/Safe and Well check:	0800 038 2323
British Lung Foundation:	www.blf.org.uk

About this leaflet

Author:	Anita Burnham, Respiratory Nurse Specialist
Written:	January 2023
Approved:	February 2023
Review Date:	February 2026
Edition:	v1

If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email pals@dchft.nhs.uk



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