BOC
A Member of The Linde Group

NHS

Oxygen Therapy.

Why is oxygen important?

When you breathe in and your lungs fill with air, oxygen passes through the walls of the air sacs within the lungs (alveoli) into your blood stream. The oxygenated blood is carried to the heart. This pumps the blood through your arteries to the muscles and tissues in your body where it is used to make energy.

For some people it may become harder to get enough oxygen into the blood stream. This lack of oxygen in the blood can mean there is not enough oxygen to meet the needs of your body. This develops gradually and can go un-noticed for some time.

The level of oxygen in your blood is most often measured by a pulse oximeter – the small clip on your finger which measures the percentage of your red blood cells that are carrying oxygen.

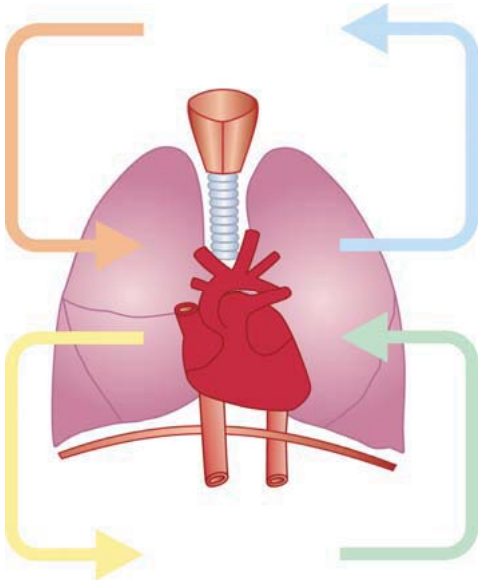
If pulse oximetry shows a low blood oxygen level you may be sent for a blood gas test. This is the most accurate way of measuring your blood oxygen levels and it involves taking a sample of arterial blood (oxygenated blood) from your earlobe or wrist.

How can oxygen therapy help?

Oxygen therapy is used to increase the amount of oxygen in the blood so the body gets the oxygen that it needs.

Oxygen can help your symptoms by:

- → Reducing the feeling of breathlessness.
- → Improving the amount of exercise or activity you can do.
- → Reducing feelings of tiredness or fatigue.



- → Improving your ability to sleep.
- → Improving quality of life by allowing you to do more and feel more comfortable.

How much oxygen will I need to use?

Oxygen is prescribed to be used in different ways and at different levels dependant on your individual needs.

Ambulatory Oxygen

Some people might have an acceptable oxygen level at rest but a low oxygen level when they are walking or exercising. Portable oxygen can be provided to prevent oxygen levels from becoming too low during activity. This may be provided as a temporary measure during the pulmonary rehabilitation exercise sessions. You will need a full assessment in order to be prescribed the right level of ambulatory oxygen.

Long Term Oxygen Therapy (LTOT)

Some people might have a low oxygen level even at rest. If the oxygen level in your blood is 92% or lower when you are well and resting, you may benefit from long term oxygen therapy.

You may be advised to use your oxygen for a certain amount of time, for example overnight or for 15 hours per day. You will need a full assessment to find the correct prescription for you.

How is oxygen provided?

An oxygen company will deliver and set up your oxygen for use as prescribed. They should show you how to use the equipment. The Health Care Professional who tells you you need oxygen at home will explain to you who the oxygen company is that will provide the oxygen.

Oxygen concentrator

A concentrator is a machine about the size of a stand-alone gas heater. It works by concentrating the oxygen in the air. It can be used with a long section of oxygen tubing to reach around the house.

The concentrator needs electricity to work. You will be given a back-up cylinder to use if there is a power failure.

Oxygen cylinder

Oxygen cylinders carry a limited amount of oxygen. They are available in different sizes. Lightweight cylinders are available so it is easier to take out and about with you. If the cylinder doesn't contain enough oxygen to last whilst you are out it can be made to last longer using an oxygen saving device called a conserver.

Some important points to remember:

- The flow rate (how many litres of oxygen flows out in one minute) is prescribed by your health care professional. You must never change the flow rate unless your health care professional changes the prescription.
- Oxygen supports combustion and things burn more vigorously. Never smoke or allow anyone else to smoke near your oxygen equipment. They must be at least 10 feet or 3 metres away.
- Always keep your oxygen equipment away from things that may cause a spark or a fire. Never use your oxygen near a gas stove. If there is a power cut use a torch – do not use a candle near your oxygen.
- If you use nasal cannulae, try to breathe through your nose. Blow your nose regularly to prevent build up of secretions in your nose.
- If your nose gets sore and dry use a water-based lubricant like KY Jelly. Never use petroleum-based products like Vaseline as they are also flammable.
- If your ears get sore, you can ask your oxygen company for some foam ear protectors.
- Take care of your equipment following the manufacturer/oxygen company guidelines.

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