

Oxygen therapy (page 1 of 3)



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You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Why do I need oxygen therapy?

Oxygen is an important gas in the air that we breathe and is vital to every cell in the body. Oxygen therapy increases the amount of oxygen that flows into the lungs and the blood stream. It is given to people who have low levels of oxygen in their blood.

Oxygen may be prescribed as long-term oxygen therapy (LTOT) or ambulatory oxygen therapy. Sometimes it may be prescribed as short-burst oxygen therapy.

What is long term oxygen therapy (LTOT)?

You have been prescribed LTOT because the levels of oxygen in your blood are low all of the time. You should use LTOT for a minimum of 15 hours a day. However a member of your respiratory team may suggest that you use it for up to 24-hours a day. The oxygen is administered via an oxygen concentrator installed in your house. Oxygen from the concentrator is delivered to you through small prongs (nasal cannulae) that fit in your nostrils. Very occasionally an oxygen mask may be used. Sufficient tubing will be attached to the prongs so that you can move around whilst still having your oxygen therapy.

How to use your oxygen concentrator

Your oxygen flow rate should be set at _____ litres per minute

You should use oxygen for at least _____ hours each day including when you are asleep at night

You can increase the number of hours you use the oxygen concentrator, but not the flow rate.

You may only increase the flow rate if advised to do so by a member of the Respiratory Team. This is because it is unsafe to do this and may slow down your breathing rate and make you drowsy.

What are the benefits of LTOT?

LTOT will increase the level of oxygen in your blood helping to reduce any strain on your heart and lungs. In some patients it may also reduce breathlessness. It may help improve your sleep, memory, energy levels, mood, alertness and appetite.

Why 15 hours each day?

Studies in Britain and the USA carried out in the early 1980's discovered that the minimum amount of time needed to benefit from oxygen therapy if you

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had chronic lung disease was 15 hours. Most of the hours can be achieved by using the oxygen overnight.

Will I become dependent on LTOT?

No. Think of it as another medicine to make you feel better. You will not become 'hooked' or dependent on it and it will not lose its useful effects. In general once the decision has been made to start LTOT it will be a life-long treatment.

What is ambulatory oxygen?

You have been prescribed ambulatory oxygen because your oxygen levels drop significantly when you move about or you have also been prescribed LTOT. Ambulatory oxygen (small portable cylinders or liquid oxygen) is available for use outside the home (for example when out shopping, hospital appointments or days out).

Your prescribed flow rate for ambulatory oxygen is _____ litres per minute

What is short burst oxygen therapy?

Short burst oxygen therapy will only be prescribed in special circumstances by the respiratory team. Its use will be discussed with you if this is the case.

Delivery devices

Nasal cannulae

- these deliver the oxygen to you via two very small plastic tubes that are inserted into your nostrils
- this delivery system may not be suitable if you have a blocked nose or a cold
- you will be able to eat and drink whilst using them
- care should be taken of the skin behind your ears as this can sometimes become sore. Small ear protectors can be obtained from your oxygen supplier
- nasal cannulae should be wiped daily with a damp cloth and changed every 4-6 weeks.

Face mask

- this delivers oxygen to you via a plastic mask over the nose and mouth
- the bridge of the nose should be monitored for redness as there is a risk of pressure sores developing
- care should be taken of the skin behind the ears as this also can become sore. Small ear protectors can be obtained from your oxygen supplier
- the face mask should be wiped daily with a damp cloth and changed after a chest infection.

Are there side effects from using oxygen?

Nose bleeds: these may occur if you are using nasal cannulae. You may need to swap to a face mask for a short period of time. If your nose becomes sore you can use a water based lubricant

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such as “KY Jelly” to help. Please discuss this with the Respiratory Team

Dryness of the throat or mouth: this may happen if you are on high levels of oxygen. It may be possible to order a humidifier. Please discuss this with the Respiratory Team

Headaches: If you are suffering from headaches, particularly in the morning you must inform the Respiratory Team. It may mean that your oxygen therapy needs reviewing

Other things to monitor: increased breathlessness, ankle swelling or increased drowsiness.

If you experience any of the above you must speak to your GP or Respiratory Team.

How to use oxygen safely

- smoking reduces the benefits of oxygen therapy and is a serious fire hazard. Do not smoke whilst having oxygen therapy
- do not allow anyone in the house to smoke
- do not use oxygen near a fire, naked flame or paraffin /gas heater
- do not use flammable products such as aerosol sprays, oil based lubricants or paint thinners whilst you are using oxygen
- warn visitors about the hazards of tripping over the oxygen tubing and take care yourself.

Other Questions:

Who will pay for the electricity if I have a concentrator?

The oxygen supplier will reimburse you for the electricity used.

Who do I contact if my oxygen is running out?

You need to contact the oxygen supplier and discuss this with them. They will require 3 working days to provide a new supply.

Can I travel with oxygen?

A supply of oxygen can be arranged free of charge anywhere in the UK. Please be aware that we require 6 weeks notice to complete the required forms for this.

Overseas travel with oxygen including airline travel incurs a cost. You, as the patient are responsible for organising this.

If you are receiving oxygen therapy you may be required to have a fitness to fly assessment which can take several weeks to arrange.

Useful contact numbers

Respiratory Nurse Specialists	01722 429220
Air Liquide South West (Oxygen Supplier)	0808 143 9999
Dolby Visivol (Oxygen Supplier)	0500 823773

Oxygen Abroad:

Department of Health	02072104850
Overseas Healthcare Team	01912 181999
Fitness to Fly (Southampton)	02380 794325

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