



*"When you can't breathe...
nothing else matters"*[®]

HOME OXYGEN THERAPY

This brochure provides brief information for those recently prescribed home oxygen therapy. For more detailed information, contact Lung Foundation Australia to purchase a copy of the booklet, "Home Oxygen" plus a range of other resources to support those with chronic lung conditions.

Why is oxygen important?

Oxygen makes up 20% of the air we breathe and is an essential part of life. We take oxygen into our bodies each time we take a breath. The oxygen from the lungs is then dissolved into the blood and delivered to the body tissues and organs as the blood circulates.

In healthy people, the lungs keep the amount of oxygen in the bloodstream at a normal level. However, if your lungs are damaged, they may not always deliver enough oxygen to the blood.

The body can tolerate low levels of oxygen for short periods of time, but low levels of oxygen for long periods of time can cause problems with your vital organs.

Who benefits from home oxygen therapy?

People with low levels of oxygen in the bloodstream will benefit from home oxygen therapy. Home oxygen therapy will increase the amount of oxygen in your blood and therefore the amount of oxygen getting to your vital organs. Your doctor will perform tests to decide whether you will benefit from having additional oxygen.

"...not all breathlessness is caused by low oxygen levels...there can be many other causes of breathlessness."

What tests will my doctor perform to decide whether I have enough oxygen in my blood?

Two tests will determine whether you have enough oxygen in your blood:

- An **arterial blood gas test (ABG)**. This test is performed by taking a sample of blood from an artery and using it to measure the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your blood.
- Another measure is **blood oxygen saturation** which is measured by attaching a small device (oximeter) to your finger. This measures the amount of oxygen your blood is holding at the moment compared to how much it is able to hold. To explain this better, think of your blood as a sponge. When a sponge becomes full of water, we call that 100% saturated, or full. Even if you were to add extra water to this sponge, it could not absorb any more. Ideally, the blood should be at least 90% saturated with oxygen. When the blood is this saturated, it cannot hold much more oxygen.

If these tests show the oxygen level in your blood is normal, then extra oxygen through home oxygen therapy is not likely to benefit you as your blood already has the oxygen it needs.

Will home oxygen treatment help me if I am breathless?

It is important to realise that not all breathlessness is caused by low oxygen levels. If tests show that your oxygen levels are normal, giving you additional oxygen will not make you feel less breathless. There can be many other causes of breathlessness. Sometimes medications, exercise programs or learning special breathing techniques can help to relieve breathlessness.

Prescribing oxygen

If your doctor has prescribed oxygen therapy, you will most likely fall into one of two categories:

1. Oxygen is a temporary treatment while you recover from an illness.
2. Oxygen will become a permanent part of your life.

If oxygen is to become a permanent part of your life, your doctor will tell you how many hours you should use oxygen each day for maximum benefit. This usually falls into one of three categories:

1. During exercise and/or everyday activities like showering
2. While you are sleeping
3. Continuous, long term oxygen – for at least 18 hours per day

Some people who have been prescribed home oxygen therapy report feeling more energetic, more refreshed in the morning, and less fatigued during the day. Some report their concentration levels are better. Not everyone notices these improvements and some do not notice any day-to-day improvements. This is normal. Remember though, oxygen therapy is still helping your body by delivering more oxygen to your vital organs.

Oxygen equipment

Oxygen is usually given through a tube with soft plastic nose prongs. Some people will have difficulty with the nose prongs such as discomfort or drying of the lining of the nose. This can be improved by applying a water-based lubricant to the nose several times a day. Alternatively, a mask can be used instead of the prongs.

The oxygen comes from either oxygen concentrators or medical oxygen cylinders.

A **home oxygen concentrator** has long tubing that allows you to move freely around the house. It concentrates oxygen by filtering the nitrogen out of the air in the room. It requires electricity to operate.

A **portable oxygen concentrator** is a smaller, lightweight machine that is designed to be carried around outside the home. They contain their own power supply.

Oxygen cylinders also come in different sizes.

A **portable cylinder** is designed to be used when leaving the home. It can be wheeled and attached to a walker, wheelchair or carried in a backpack.

A **larger freestanding cylinder** can be used in the home as a back-up source in the event of a power failure.

Oxygen safety

Oxygen use in the home is safe. Oxygen does not explode; however, it does support combustion. This means that smoking whilst using oxygen is dangerous. Oxygen should not be used while close to gas stoves, lighted fireplaces, or any other sources of heat or open flame.

A few tips for those new to home oxygen

Some facts and tips for those prescribed home oxygen therapy:

1. Have your oxygen prescription reviewed regularly.
2. Home oxygen is not addictive.
3. Home oxygen does not always relieve breathlessness and not all those who experience breathlessness will benefit from home oxygen.
4. Most people find the self-consciousness associated with oxygen therapy is short-lived. The positive benefits should quickly start to outweigh any embarrassment.
5. Continue on with everyday life; try to keep up activities that are important to you.
6. Some oxygen equipment is funded, but not all. Ask your healthcare team for guidance.
7. Travelling with oxygen is possible and requires planning.

Lung Foundation Australia has developed additional resources for people with lung disease that you will find helpful. These can be accessed via our website, www.lungfoundation.com.au or by calling our Information and Support Centre on **1800 654 301**.

“Most people find the self-consciousness associated with oxygen therapy is short-lived. The positive benefits should quickly start to outweigh any embarrassment.”

.

TD0616V3HOT

This brochure is one in a series produced by Lung Foundation Australia to provide information on lung disease, its treatment and related issues. The information published by Lung Foundation Australia is designed to be used as a guide only, is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical treatment and is presented for the sole purpose of disseminating information to reduce lung disease. Any information relating to medication brand names is correct at the time of printing. Lung Foundation Australia has no control or responsibility for the availability of medications, which may occasionally be discontinued or withdrawn. Please consult your family doctor or specialist respiratory physician if you have further questions relating to the information contained in this leaflet. For details of patient support groups in Australia please call 1800 654 301.

