

# Your equipment checklists: Choosing a portable oxygen concentrator



## Checklist 2: Choosing a portable oxygen concentrator

There are quite a few portable concentrators on the market and each one has a different set of features. Not all models are suitable for all home oxygen users and it is best to ask your healthcare team for help in selecting one that is right for you.

Also, given that a portable concentrator may cost between \$5500 and \$7500 new and cannot usually be returned or exchanged, it is well worth spending some time researching your options before you buy one. If possible, also try before you buy.

### Does the concentrator deliver enough oxygen for me?

Most portable concentrators deliver oxygen in a pulsed dose, which means you receive oxygen when you breathe in, but not when you breathe out. This system is suitable for many people, but not everyone. Portable concentrators that deliver a continuous flow of oxygen tend to be heavier. Also, some machines can deliver enough oxygen for those requiring higher flow rates and others cannot. It is critical to actually test the portable concentrator you are considering (with the help of your healthcare team) before you purchase it, to make sure it will deliver enough oxygen for your needs. Questions you might want to ask your healthcare team include:

- Can you please make sure this portable concentrator can deliver the oxygen I need when at rest and when exerting myself?
- I would like to use my portable concentrator at night. Will this machine provide the oxygen I need when asleep?
- I have sleep apnoea. Can I still use a portable oxygen concentrator?

Other questions you may want to ask your healthcare team or the company selling the concentrator include:

- If I hyperventilate (breathe quickly) will the machine keep up?
- What is the maximum number of breaths per minute the machine will deliver at my flow rate?
- Will I get enough oxygen if I mouth breathe?
- Can I use the concentrator with a CPAP machine?

As well as checking whether the portable concentrator is capable of meeting your current oxygen needs, it is also wise to ask your healthcare team for an opinion on whether they believe the machine is *likely to meet your oxygen needs in the future*.

### What weight can I comfortably carry around with me?

Portable concentrators come in a range of different weights. Some can be carried on your back and others wheeled. Test out the weight yourself at home. Put an equivalent weight into a backpack or onto a wheeling device and try carrying it around with you for a while.

### What is the difference in battery life?

Battery life will vary from model to model. Factors such as your flow rate and the number of breaths you take per minute will also affect how long your battery lasts for. If the battery on the concentrator is not long enough for you, what is the cost of purchasing a spare battery? How heavy is this spare battery and are you able to carry it around with you? How long does the battery take to recharge?

# Your equipment checklists: Choosing a portable oxygen cylinder



## Checklist 1: Choosing a portable oxygen cylinder

### How long am I going to need this equipment?

- Are you going to be on home oxygen for a short time (such as 3 months) or for the longer term? Ask your doctor if you are not sure. This may affect whether you buy or rent your equipment. You may also wish to have portable equipment for use on a holiday, plane flight or other situation where it is impractical to take your concentrator.

### Do I need a back-up plan for my home oxygen?

- If you are a long term oxygen user, you may wish to have some form of back-up oxygen supply that you can use if your home concentrator fails or there is an emergency. This is commonly a large portable oxygen cylinder. You may already have received one as part of a funding package, but if not, then you can arrange for one yourself.
- Portable oxygen cylinders can also be used instead of the home concentrator if there is a power failure.

### What size cylinder can I manage?

- Base your decision on what you or your carer can either wheel, carry or attach to a wheeled walker or wheelchair. If mounting the cylinder to a wheeled walker, consider your need to continue using the seat. Larger portable cylinders may rest across the bars under the seat if they are appropriately secured.
- Make sure that you or your carer can lift the cylinder into the car or onto the bus or train. The smaller the cylinder the lighter it will be, but the sooner it will be empty.
- If you are going out on your own, make sure the effort of taking a cylinder with you does not create more difficulties than being out without the oxygen.
- Determine how long you will be out for and how much of this time you may wish to use cylinder oxygen. The bigger the cylinder the longer it will last, but the heavier it will be. Choose the biggest cylinder you can easily manage.

**TIP:** Different companies offer different sized cylinders. You may need to try a couple of sizes before deciding which is most manageable for you. Many companies charge the same price for the hire of portable cylinders, no matter what size they are. The smaller the cylinder you choose, the more you may need to hire and therefore the more it may cost. You may decide to choose a mix of cylinders for different situations.

### Purchase or rent?

- Is there an option to rent or buy? What are the cost differences over time?
- In most cases in Australia, gas manufacturers will not fill your privately owned cylinders.

### Delivery and refill costs

- What does it cost to get cylinders delivered? How many cylinders can be delivered for that one delivery fee?
- What does it cost to get each cylinder refilled?
- Can a relative pick up the cylinders from the supplier to save on delivery charges?

### Accessories

What accessories do you require and how much do they cost? You will need spare nasal prongs and tubing.

**TIP:** Remember you may already be receiving some of these accessories as part of your funded oxygen equipment.

# Your equipment checklists: Things to ask a supplier

If you have a choice of suppliers where you live, it is important to do a little research so you choose a company that is right for you. Shop around for equipment, cost, service and local access that best suits you.

## Training and support

- Learning how to operate your new oxygen equipment can be stressful. Does the supplier teach you and your carer to use the equipment?
- If you need extra help, do they have a person you can call for help?

## Emergency

- Does the supplier have someone you can contact in an emergency? If so, what hours does this service operate?

## Travel

- If you plan to travel interstate or overseas, can the oxygen supplier help arrange for a portable oxygen supply or portable concentrator to be available for you at the other end? Many international airlines will only allow portable concentrators on board that they have approved. Check the ones your airline will allow. Most manufacturers have agencies worldwide to deal with equipment problems.

## Cost

- Is the equipment the best value for money?

## Servicing & Delivery

- Does the supplier have local service support?
- Will the supplier offer convenient delivery options?

# Your equipment checklists: Other considerations

## Can I try before I buy?

Because it is so important to test a portable concentrator before you buy it or rent it long-term, many companies offer a trial program or a short-term rental program. Some pulmonary rehabilitation or respiratory outreach programs use portable oxygen concentrators and are able to arrange short trials too. Is there a cost to trial the machine?

## Should I buy new, second hand or rent?

If the cost of a new portable concentrator is an issue, you could consider purchasing a second hand one. Each portable concentrator has a running metre which tells you how many hours it has been used. By comparing this to the hours the manufacturer expects the machine to last, you will get a clearer picture of how much longer the machine may last and when the battery may need to be replaced. Before purchasing a concentrator, have it checked by an oxygen distributor to ensure it is in proper working order. You may also like to check to see that it can be repaired in Australia. If it is still under warranty, can the warranty be transferred to a second owner?

Many companies also offer long-term rental agreements for portable concentrators. This is often a good option for those planning to travel overseas or to be away from home for an extended period of time.

Lung Foundation Australia has a short guide for those wishing to purchase/sell second hand portable oxygen concentrators. Call 1800 654 301 to get a copy or go to the website [www.lungfoundation.com.au](http://www.lungfoundation.com.au).

## What is the difference in warranty and repair arrangements?

If buying new, check the warranty details of the concentrators you are investigating. Here are some things you might like to check:

- How long is the warranty?
- What does it cover?
- If you need to make a warranty claim are you provided with a replacement machine until yours is repaired?
- Where do you need to take a faulty machine to have it inspected?
- If this location is not close-by, do you need to pay the cost of transport to get it there?
- Can the warranty be transferred to another person, if you decide to sell the machine?

Another issue to consider is the ease with which you can get your portable concentrator repaired once the warranty expires. Here are some things you might like to check:

- How often should you have your machine serviced?
- Can it be done locally or does it need to be sent away?
- Do you need a replacement concentrator while yours is being fixed? If so, does the company offer any sort of short-term loan or rental program? What are the costs?