Home oxygen therapy booklet

Being prescribed home oxygen therapy can feel a bit overwhelming at first. You may have questions about why you need it and how to use it in your daily life. This booklet provides simple, practical information to help you use your oxygen safely and feel more confident at home and when you're out and about.

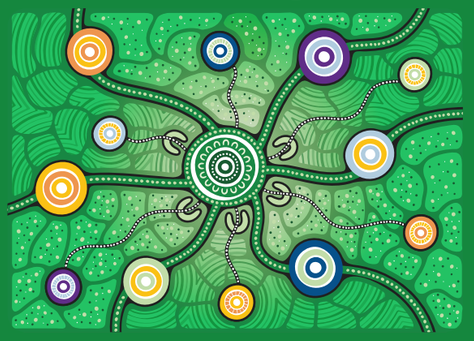


Lung Foundation Australia

About us

For more than 30 years, Lung Foundation Australia has walked alongside people living with lung disease and lung cancer, helping them navigate some of life's hardest moments with care, knowledge and hope. We provide trusted support through our nurses, peer support programs and social workers. We fund research that leads to better treatments. We speak out for people who need lung health to be taken seriously. Everything we do helps protect the gift of breath, so that more Australians can breathe easier, live well and feel less alone.

Acknowledgement of Country



Lung Foundation Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work throughout Australia and their unceded sovereignty of and continuing connection to land and sea. We pay our respects to First Nations' cultures and to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in lung disease and lung cancer. We commit to working with communities to Close the Gap on lung health and build on the strengths of communities to lead the path to healthy lungs for all.

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Top things to know about oxygen therapy

1. **Regular medical reviews are vital:** A respiratory specialist should check your oxygen prescription at least once a year or if you feel your condition has changed. *Do not adjust your oxygen flow rate on your own.* **It is important to treat oxygen like any other prescribed medication.**

2. **You will not become dependent on oxygen therapy:** Using oxygen as prescribed will not make your lungs 'lazy' or dependent. It gives your body the extra oxygen it needs to function well.

3. **There are different types of oxygen equipment:** There are two main types of oxygen equipment used in Australia: oxygen concentrators and oxygen cylinders. You can use different types of oxygen equipment at home or when you go out. Your healthcare team will help you choose the type (or combination) that best fits your lifestyle and medical needs.

4. Some oxygen equipment is **government-funded**. Many people who use oxygen therapy qualify, but eligibility varies between states and territories. If you need extra or different equipment, you may be able to buy or hire it from your oxygen supplier.



Work with your healthcare team to determine which equipment is right for you. Your oxygen supplier can provide details about models available, funding arrangements and practical features. Ask your supplier if they have any information or a comparison list to help you review your options.

5. **Oxygen is safe to use – but it increases fire risk:** Oxygen does not burn on its own, but it can cause flames to burn faster and more intensely. Keep yourself and your equipment away from open flames, sparks and high heat. This includes cigarettes, e-cigarettes, gas stoves, BBQs and *even birthday candles!*

6. **You can continue with everyday life:** It's normal to need time to adjust to using oxygen equipment. Many people find they can return to their usual routines and activities once they get used to it. Some people use oxygen only at certain times of the day while others use it continuously. If you have time off oxygen, you may choose to stay active and enjoy outings at your pace. If you use oxygen all the time, it's common to feel self-conscious at first, but these feelings usually ease as confidence grows.

7. **You can travel with oxygen equipment, but you'll need to plan ahead**: A few important things to remember include:
   - You may need a letter from your doctor stating that you are fit to travel
   - You need to know how to correctly transport your equipment
   - You should find out if you can use your portable oxygen during the journey
   - Ask how you can arrange an oxygen supply at your destination.

8. **Always have an emergency plan in place:** In the event of a power outage, it is important to try and remain calm. Although a power outage can affect your oxygen use most oxygen users (even those on oxygen for 18 hours a day or more) can safely manage without their oxygen supply for several hours by resting. Call an ambulance if you need urgent assistance.

Oxygen and oxygen therapy

Understanding your oxygen prescription

What is an oxygen prescription?

If oxygen therapy is needed, your doctor will give you an oxygen prescription.
Your prescription should include:

1. When you should use oxygen and for how many hours a day
2. How much oxygen you should use (your **flow rate**)
3. Which oxygen equipment you should use.

Oxygen levels are individual, so oxygen therapy is prescribed differently for each person.

1 When do you need oxygen and for how many hours a day?

Your doctor will tell you when to use oxygen therapy and for how long. Some people need oxygen at certain times, such as:

- **During activity (exertion):** Some people's oxygen levels drop when they are walking, exercising or doing everyday activities such as cooking, shopping or getting dressed. In this case, oxygen may be **prescribed only during activity.**
- **During sleep:** Oxygen levels can sometimes fall while you are sleeping. If this happens, oxygen may be **prescribed only to use overnight.**
- **At rest:** Some people have low oxygen levels even when they are sitting or resting. In this case, oxygen may be **prescribed for longer periods during the day.**

Your oxygen prescription will include how many hours a day you should use your oxygen therapy.

Like any other medication, oxygen should be used exactly as prescribed, whether you are at home or out and about. Do not adjust your oxygen settings without speaking with your healthcare team first.

If your breathing changes or you feel oxygen therapy is no longer helping in the same way, speak with your doctor rather than adjusting the oxygen yourself. Your doctor may need to check your oxygen levels again to see if your prescription needs to be updated.

2 How much oxygen should you use?

The amount of oxygen you receive is called the **flow rate**; this describes how much oxygen your equipment delivers and is measured in litres per minute (L/min or LPM). Set your oxygen equipment to the flow rate prescribed by your doctor so that the correct amount of oxygen is delivered to you.

Your doctor may prescribe:

- One flow rate for normal daily activities
- A higher flow rate when you are exercising or being more active
- A different flow rate while you are sleeping.

Some portable oxygen devices use **numbered settings instead of litres per minute**. Your healthcare team will explain how these settings relate to your oxygen prescription.

Sample oxygen prescription

Hours of use + flow rate + mode + device = your oxygen prescription

Activity	How long	Flow rate / setting	Mode	Device
At rest	Daytime/16hrs	2 L/min	Continuous	Home concentrator
During activity	As needed	3 L/min	Continuous	Portable concentrator
Out and about	As needed	5	Pulse dose	Portable concentrator
Sleeping	Overnight/8 hours	2 L/min	Continuous	Home concentrator

Mode refers to how oxygen is delivered. Continuous flow delivers oxygen all the time, while pulse dose delivers oxygen when you breathe in.

Your prescription may also include information on **who to contact if your oxygen equipment is not working**.

Key points:

- Your doctor should check your prescription 4 to 8 weeks after you start oxygen therapy.

How long should you use oxygen therapy and when should your treatment be reviewed?

How long you need oxygen therapy is different for everyone. It depends on how low your oxygen levels are and the cause of your lung condition. Your doctor can help explain which option is best for you.

Temporary (short term) oxygen therapy

Sometimes blood oxygen levels drop when you are unwell and improve again when you recover. In this case, oxygen may only be needed for a short time, such as while you are in hospital or for several weeks afterwards. Your doctor may perform repeat tests to check how your oxygen levels change as you recover.

Long-term oxygen therapy

For some people, oxygen therapy becomes an ongoing part of managing their lung condition. If oxygen levels remain low or regularly drop during particular activities (such as during sleep or activity), oxygen may be prescribed for longer-term use.

Even if you are prescribed long-term oxygen therapy, your doctor will usually review your oxygen needs at least once a year to see if any changes are needed. Regular reviews help ensure you are receiving the right amount of oxygen for your needs.

If your oxygen levels improve and you no longer need oxygen therapy, this is a positive sign. Your lungs have improved to the point where they can get enough oxygen into your body on their own.

Oxygen equipment

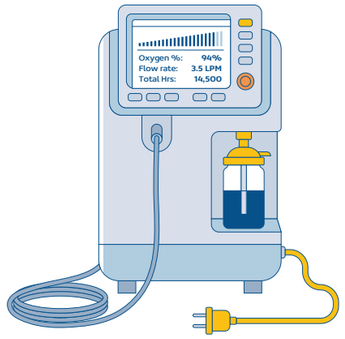
Types of oxygen equipment

There are two main types of equipment that provide oxygen therapy:

- Oxygen concentrators, available as a home concentrator or a smaller portable version
- Oxygen cylinders.

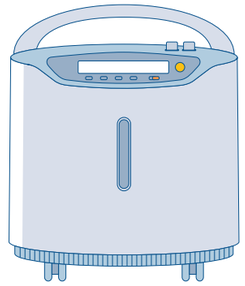
Your doctor will discuss which equipment is most suitable for your oxygen prescription, daily activities and lifestyle. Some people might use more than one type of equipment. For example, they might use a home concentrator inside the house and a portable device when leaving the home.

Types of oxygen equipment



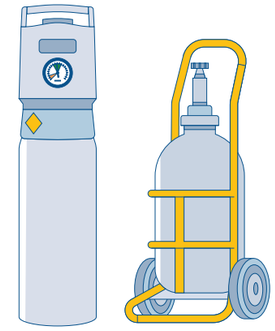
Home oxygen concentrator

Best for home use, plugs into a power outlet



Portable oxygen concentrator

Good for use outside the home, battery powered



Oxygen cylinder

Available as a stationary cylinder for use as a back up at home, or a portable cylinder for when you are out of the house.

Oxygen concentrators

Oxygen concentrators are machines that draw in air and filter out other gases, leaving a higher concentration of oxygen for you to breathe. **There are two main types** of oxygen concentrators:



Home oxygen concentrator

These machines are usually about the size of a small bedside table and are designed to remain inside your home.

- Plug into a standard power outlet
- Provide oxygen as a continuous flow
- Allow you to move around the home with long oxygen tubing
- Are typically used when resting, sleeping or spending long periods of time at home.



Portable oxygen concentrator

These are smaller devices designed to be used outside the home.

- Are lighter in weight (1-9 kgs) and either carried with a strap, in a backpack or wheeled on a trolley
- Powered by rechargeable batteries
- Allow you to leave home and use oxygen therapy during your everyday activities
- The two delivery types are explained below.

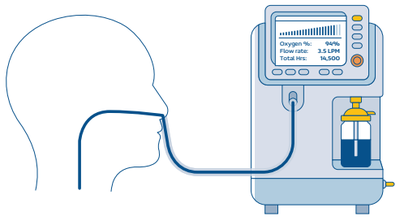
Home oxygen concentrators rely on electricity, which is why some people are also provided with a *backup oxygen cylinder in case of a power outage*.

How oxygen is delivered: continuous flow vs pulse-dose

Your concentrator will deliver oxygen in one of several ways depending on the device you are using and your oxygen prescription.

Continues flow

Oxygen flows **all the time**, with every breath you take

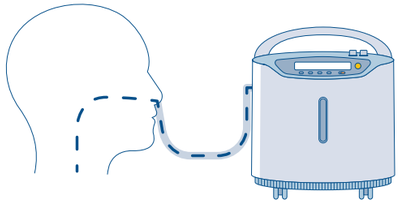


- Home concentrations and some heavier portable concentrators
- Day and night use
- Consistent oxygen supply

Your **healthcare team** will advise which delivery system is right for you.

Pulse-dose delivery

Oxygen delivered **only when** you **breathe in**



- Portable concentrators and cylinders
- Saves battery and oxygen
- Should not be used while sleeping
- May NOT be appropriate for people with higher oxygen need

The machine senses when you start to breathe in and sends a small burst (or pulse) of oxygen at that moment. This helps to reduce the amount of oxygen used, extend battery life and make portable machines lighter and easier to carry.

Oxygen cylinders

Oxygen cylinders are metal tanks that contain compressed oxygen. Oxygen flows from the cylinder, through a regulator. This is a valve system that controls the amount of oxygen you receive. How long a cylinder **lasts depends on your oxygen flow rate and how often you use it**. There are **two common types of oxygen cylinders**:



Stationary cylinders

These are larger oxygen cylinders that are usually kept inside the home. They are generally used as a backup oxygen supply for people who use a home oxygen concentrator when:

- there is a power outage
- the concentrator is not working properly
- you need a temporary alternative oxygen supply.

Stationary cylinders are large and heavy; they are usually placed in a fixed location within the home and should be secured to prevent them from tipping or falling.



Portable cylinders

These are smaller cylinders that are designed to be used when leaving the home. They allow people to continue activities outside the house, for example:

- walking
- attending appointments
- shopping
- social outings and travels.

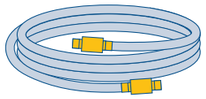
These cylinders hold less oxygen and may need to be replaced or refilled more frequently, so it is important you know how to check the oxygen level.

Your **oxygen supplier** will show you how to:

- Safely store and operate your cylinder
- How to check the oxygen level
- Estimate how long your cyinder will last
- Safely transport cylinder when travelling

Oxygen accessories

Oxygen therapy is delivered using accessories. These accessories ensure oxygen is delivered safely, comfortably and at the correct flow rate. Your oxygen supplier or healthcare team will show you how to use them and how to care for them.

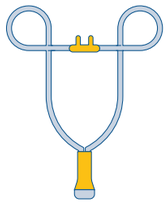


Oxygen tubing

Oxygen tubing connects your oxygen equipment to your nasal prongs or mask.

Oxygen tubing allows you to move around more freely at home, such as walking between rooms or completing daily activities.

Your oxygen supplier can help you choose an appropriate tubing length for your home.

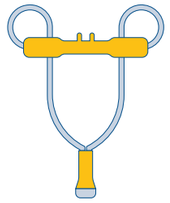


Nasal prongs

Nasal prongs are two small soft tubes that sit just inside the nostrils. They are connected to oxygen tubing that fits around the ears and under the chin.

Nasal prongs are often used because they:

- allow you to talk, eat and drink while using oxygen
- can be used for long periods of oxygen therapy.



Oxymisers

An Oxymiser is a special type of nasal prongs that delivers oxygen more efficiently.

It has a small reservoir that stores oxygen and releases it when you breathe in. This helps your cylinder last longer or provides you with a higher percentage of oxygen at a lower flow rate.

Not everyone needs an Oxymiser. Your healthcare team will let you know if it's right for you.



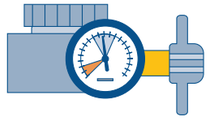
Oxygen masks

Oxygen can also be delivered through a mask that covers the nose and mouth.

Masks may be used:

- when higher flow rates are required
- for short-term use, such as during illness or in hospital
- when nasal prongs are not suitable.

Your healthcare team will advise if a mask is needed as part of your oxygen therapy.

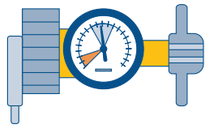


Oxygen regulators

Oxygen cylinders have a regulator to control the flow of oxygen.

The flow rate can be adjusted to match your oxygen prescription. Once it's set, oxygen flows through the tubing to your nasal prongs or mask.

Your oxygen supplier will show you how to use the regulator and adjust the flow rate if needed.



Oxygen conserving devices

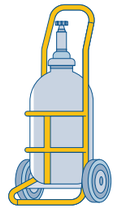
An oxygen conserving device is a small attachment that helps your oxygen cylinder last longer.

It does this by delivering a pulse flow, only releasing oxygen when you breathe in, rather than continuously.

This can help:

- extend battery life
- allow oxygen cylinders to last longer between refills or replacements.

Your healthcare team will let you know if an oxygen conserving device is suitable for you.



Cylinder trolleys and carriers

Portable oxygen cylinders can be heavy to carry, so a range of accessories are available to make transporting them safer and easier such a trolley, wheeled cart, carry bag or even secured to a walker or wheelchair.



Humidifiers

Humidifiers add moisture to your oxygen to help reduce dryness in your nose. Humidifiers are not suitable for everyone. Your healthcare team will guide you.

Equipment safety

Oxygen therapy is safe when used correctly. These precautions will help protect you, your household and your equipment.

Fire safety

Oxygen itself does not burn, but it can cause flames to burn more quickly and intensely. For this reason, it is very important to keep oxygen equipment away from flames, heat and sparks. Always:

- keep oxygen equipment at least 2 metres away from open flames
- keep oxygen away from gas stoves, heaters, fireplaces and BBQs
- never smoke while using oxygen
- avoid being near cigarettes, e-cigarettes or other smoking products
- keep oxygen away from candles and birthday candles.

If someone in your household smokes, they should always smoke outside and away from any oxygen equipment.

Safe placement of oxygen concentrators

Where you place your oxygen concentrator at home is important for both safety and to ensure proper airflow around it. To help ensure safe operation:

- place the concentrator on a flat, stable surface
- place the concentrator in a well-ventilated area where air can circulate freely
- avoid placing the concentrator in cupboards or confined spaces
- keep the concentrator at least 15cm away from the wall
- if placing the concentrator near a window, make sure curtains do not block the airflow
- do not place the concentrator in bathrooms or areas where liquids could be spilled on it.
  - Ensure your oxygen tubing is long enough to reach the bathroom without moving the concentrator itself into the room.

Managing oxygen tubing safely

Oxygen tubing allows you to move around more freely, but it can sometimes create trip hazards. To reduce the risk of falls:

- keep tubing away from walkways where possible
- avoid placing tubing under rugs or furniture
- ensure tubing is not twisted or kinked
- be aware of tubing when walking around the house.
  - Some people find it helpful to use tubing clips or guides to keep tubing organised.

Did you know? Oxygen tubing length can have an impact on oxygen flow. It is important that you do not add extra lengths of tubing to the original tubing provided to you. Ask the manufacturer about the maximum length of tubing you can use to ensure the correct flow of oxygen.

Transporting oxygen cylinders and concentrators

Oxygen cylinders

Oxygen cylinders should always be handled and transported carefully. When transporting oxygen cylinders:

- never leave cylinders loose in a vehicle
  - always secure your portable cylinder upright in a car so it does not move if there is a sudden stop
- use an approved bag, trolley or carrier when moving portable cylinders
- secure stationary cylinders so they cannot roll or fall
- avoid exposing cylinders to excessive heat (e.g. do not leave unattended in a car).

Your oxygen supplier will show you how to safely transport your cylinder when travelling.

Oxygen concentrators

When transporting portable oxygen concentrators, it is important that you:

- ensure they are in an upright position
- secured correctly.

Keeping your equipment in good condition

Regularly checking your equipment helps ensure oxygen therapy continues to work safely. Check your equipment for:

- loose connections
- damaged tubing
- unusual sounds from machines
- reduced oxygen flow.

If something does not seem right, contact your oxygen supplier or healthcare team for advice.

Power supply and blackout plan

Home oxygen concentrators rely on electricity to work, so it is important to have a plan if you lose power supply.

You can register by contacting your electricity provider directly or asking your healthcare professional.

You should make sure that you register with your electricity provider as a **life-support customer**. This can help you:

- receive advance notice of planned power outages
- access priority assistance during electricity interruptions
- reduce risks associated with unexpected power loss.

Some people who use a home oxygen concentrator are also provided with a **backup oxygen cylinder** or another oxygen source that does not rely on electricity. This allows you to continue receiving your oxygen therapy even if the power goes out.

Your healthcare team or oxygen supplier can show you **how to switch from your concentrator to your backup oxygen cylinder** so you are prepared if an emergency occurs.

What to do if the power goes out

Steps to follow during a power outage if you are using oxygen therapy.

Power outage occurs
Stay calm and check your oxygen equipment.

→

Switch to backup oxygen cylinder
if you have one.

→

Contact your oxygen supplier to confirm details of outage. (if available).

→

Seek medical help
if your oxygen supply runs low.

Your **healthcare team or oxygen supplier** can help you prepare a plan for power outages

Emergency preparation checklist

Before a power outage occurs, it is helpful to make sure you know how to access your backup oxygen supply.

- I know where my backup oxygen cylinder is stored
- I know how to connect my oxygen tubing to the cylinder
- I know how to turn the cylinder on and off
- I know approximately how long the cylinder will last at my prescribed flow rate
- Important phone numbers are kept nearby (oxygen supplier, doctor, electricity provider)
- A family member, carer or neighbour knows that I use oxygen therapy.

How long will a backup oxygen cylinder last?

Higher oxygen flow rates will use oxygen more quickly. The length of time a cylinder lasts depends on:

- the size of the cylinder
- the flow rate prescribed by your doctor.

Example guide

Flow rate	Small portable cylinder	Large backup cylinder
1 L/min	About 6–8 hours	About 20–24 hours
2 L/min	About 3–4 hours	About 10–12 hours
3 L/min	About 2–3 hours	About 6–8 hours
4 L/min	About 1.5–2 hours	About 5–6 hours

Your oxygen supplier or healthcare team can explain **how long your specific cylinder will last** based on your prescription and the cylinder size you use.

Caring for your oxygen equipment

Your oxygen equipment is designed to deliver oxygen safely and effectively. Taking care of your equipment will help ensure it works properly and remains comfortable to use. Your oxygen supplier will show you how to use and care for your equipment when it is first installed. Always follow the instructions provided for your specific device.

Oxygen concentrator care

Your concentrator's instruction manual will explain the maintenance required for your device. **Make sure you understand what is involved and ask your oxygen supplier for a demonstration if you have any questions.**

Some general reminders include:

- Wash your concentrator filters regularly and replace them yearly
- Keep the concentrator clean and free from dust
- Some oxygen suppliers offer servicing where they will regularly check your oxygen equipment. In some cases, they may deliver newly tested equipment to your home while your current equipment is serviced at their facility.

Caring for oxygen accessories

Oxygen accessories help deliver oxygen comfortably and effectively. Keeping them clean and replacing them regularly helps prevent irritation, infection and equipment problems.

Oxygen accessory	What it does	How to clean	When to replace
Nasal prongs (nasal cannula)	Delivers oxygen into your nose.	Wash weekly with warm soapy water and a soft cloth. Rinse well and allow to air dry. Clean more often if you have a cold or infection.	Replace every 4–6 weeks, or sooner if they become hard, brittle or uncomfortable.
Oxygen mask	Delivers oxygen to your nose and mouth.		
Oxygen tubing	Carries oxygen from the concentrator or cylinder to your nasal prongs.	Wipe with a clean damp cloth if dirty. Check regularly for twists or kinks.	Replace if tubing becomes dirty, damaged or badly kinked.
Foam ear protectors / pads	Protect skin behind the ears from rubbing.	Wipe with warm soapy water if needed.	Replace when worn or no longer cushioning the tubing.
Humidifier bottle (if used)	Adds moisture to oxygen to reduce dryness.	Follow your supplier's instructions. Usually washed daily with mild soapy water, rinsed and refilled with sterile or distilled water.	Replace according to supplier instructions or if cracked or damaged.

Helpful tips

- Always keep spare nasal prongs and tubing available
- Check tubing regularly for kinks or twisting
- If accessories look damaged or worn, replace them sooner
- Replacement accessories such as tubing and nasal prongs are available from your oxygen supplier.

If oxygen accessories cause irritation

Some people may experience irritation around the nose or ears when using nasal prongs. This is common and can often be improved with small adjustments. Ask your healthcare team if you need help getting a comfortable fit.

Nasal moisture

Use a water-based nasal lubricant 2-3 times per day.

Do NOT use Vaseline or petroleum jelly.

Ear cushioning

Use foam pads or soft cushioning behind the ears.

Use saline spray

If your nose feels dry or blocked.

Different prong types

Ask your oxygen supplier about different nasal prong styles.

What should I do if I cannot breathe properly through my nose?

You can still use nasal prongs even when your nose is blocked. Oxygen is drawn from the back of the nose as you breathe in, even when breathing through your mouth. To help reduce nasal stuffiness, it is safe to use saline nasal spray several times a day for a few days. This is only recommended as a short-term solution. If your blocked nose continues or keeps returning, contact your doctor or respiratory nurse for advice.

Funding, costs and support for oxygen therapy

Oxygen therapy can involve ongoing practical and financial costs. These costs may include:

Type of cost	What this may include
Electricity use	Increased household electricity from oxygen concentrator use
Equipment servicing	Maintenance or safety checks
Consumables	Nasal prongs, masks, tubing, humidifier bottles or accessories
Delivery fees	Transport of cylinders or replacement equipment
Backup oxygen	Equipment for emergencies or outages
Rental or purchase	Costs if not covered by funding or health insurance.

You may be eligible for government funding or other support to help manage these costs. The type of assistance available varies depending on your circumstance, where you live and the equipment prescribed. Your healthcare team and oxygen supplier can help you understand what support may apply to you.

Government home oxygen programs

Each Australian state and territory operates a **Home Oxygen Program** or a similar scheme. These programs may help cover costs of:

- oxygen equipment (such as concentrators or cylinders)
- oxygen supplies and accessories
- delivery, servicing and maintenance
- replacement of equipment when required.

You may also be eligible for electricity rebates or medical cooling and heating concessions.

Eligibility criteria and application processes vary between states and territories, and you will need to speak with your healthcare provider about referrals or applications.

Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)

If you hold a DVA Gold or White Card, you may be eligible for oxygen equipment and support services. Speak with your healthcare provider or contact DVA for more information.

Private health insurance

Some private health insurers may provide partial cover for oxygen equipment or related supplies. Speak with your insurer to find out what items are covered, what the waiting periods are, what documentation you require and your insurer's preferred suppliers.

Buying or renting oxygen equipment privately

If you are not eligible for government funding, you may need to **purchase or rent oxygen equipment privately**. Before deciding if this is right for you:

- speak with your healthcare provider
- ensure equipment meets Australian safety standards
- choose a reputable oxygen supplier
- ask about servicing and warranty
- consider ongoing costs such as electricity, consumables and delivery.

In Australia, approved **oxygen suppliers may offer rental arrangements** for equipment such as stationary or portable oxygen concentrators, oxygen cylinders or backup oxygen for emergencies. This may be a suitable option especially if oxygen therapy is expected to be short term, if you are waiting for funding approval or if your oxygen needs are changing.

Before renting equipment, it is important to speak with your healthcare provider to ensure the equipment is appropriate and meets Australian safety standards. You should also understand what is included in the rental agreement, including servicing, replacement and ongoing costs such as electricity and consumables.

Always obtain oxygen equipment through a reputable supplier with medical oversight, as using equipment that is not prescribed or properly maintained may affect your safety and health outcomes.

Never purchase oxygen without speaking to your healthcare provider.

Living well with oxygen

Starting oxygen therapy may feel like a big change in your life. You may need to plan activities differently and adjust how you do your daily tasks. These adjustments are a normal part of living with a lung condition.

Oxygen at home

Tips for managing oxygen at home

- Use only the length of tubing you need. Attach extension tubing only when required after a discussion with your oxygen provider.
- If joining two pieces of tubing, use a swivel connector to help prevent twisting.
- To reduce kinks, lay tubing flat in a warm room or in the sun. As it warms, twists may gradually straighten.
- When walking around, walk slowly and hold the tubing away from your body
- Where possible, avoid running tubing across doorways, walkways or at the top of stairs.
- Concentrator motors can produce noise. Positioning the device in a hallway or shared space rather than a bedroom may help reduce sleep disturbance.
- If you spend time outdoors, speak with your oxygen supplier about using extension tubing with a swivel connector. You may also consider positioning the concentrator closer to an external doorway or window, while ensuring tubing remains free from kinks or trip hazards.

Going out with oxygen

Leaving the house while using oxygen can feel daunting at first. You may worry about managing the equipment, how long your oxygen will last or how others may react. These feelings are common and often ease as confidence grows.

Helpful tips when leaving home with oxygen:

- Start small – keep outings simple until you feel confident
- Plan ahead – consider parking, stairs or lift access and whether you may need additional support such as a walker or wheelchair
- Check your oxygen supply – understand how long your portable equipment will last and take enough oxygen for your trip
- Bring extras – pack spare batteries or backup equipment if required
- Practise at home – become familiar with using and changing your equipment before going out.

What if I run out of oxygen while I am out?

Try and stay calm. Many people can safely manage short periods without supplemental oxygen, but this varies depending on your condition. Discuss this with your doctor and develop a clear action plan with your healthcare team and family so you know what to do if this situation occurs.

Sleep and using oxygen overnight

It may take time to get used to sleeping with oxygen equipment.

To improve comfort and safety overnight:

- Arrange tubing so it does not wrap around your body or become caught in bedding
- Elevate your head slightly with pillows if this helps your breathing
- If your concentrator is in your bedroom and the noise affects your sleep, speak with your supplier about whether it can be moved.

If you continue to have problems sleeping, feel more breathless at night or notice changes in your symptoms, discuss this with your healthcare team.

Showering and personal care

Some people can experience breathlessness while having a shower. If recommended by your healthcare team, using oxygen while in the shower is safe.

When using oxygen in wet areas, follow these safety precautions:

- Do not bring your home or portable oxygen concentrator into the bathroom
  - Only oxygen tubing should enter the wet shower area
- Always keep the oxygen machine and all electrical parts in a dry place to prevent it from getting wet.

Confidence and socialisation

Using oxygen in public can feel confronting. Some people worry about being stared at, receiving unwanted questions or being treated differently. It is important to remember that oxygen therapy is a medical treatment that supports your health and independence. Over time, many people find that their confidence grows as they become more comfortable using oxygen in everyday settings.

You may notice that some people look at your equipment out of curiosity or concern. This can feel uncomfortable, but it does not mean you are being judged. Often, people simply do not understand what oxygen therapy is or why it is needed.

Strategies to help build confidence:

- Start by going out with people you trust until you feel more comfortable
- Choose familiar places where you feel safe and supported
- Practise using your oxygen equipment in public settings gradually
- Focus on the activity you are doing rather than the equipment you are using
- Remind yourself that using oxygen is a positive step towards staying active.

Responding to questions or attention

Some people find it helpful to have a simple explanation ready if they are asked about their oxygen therapy. For example: *"I have a lung condition, and oxygen helps me breathe more easily."*

You can choose how much you want to share. It is okay to keep your explanation brief or to change the subject.

Managing feelings about appearance and stigma

It is normal to feel self-conscious about changes in appearance when starting oxygen therapy. These feelings may include frustration, sadness, embarrassment or loss of confidence. Over time, many people find that these concerns lessen as oxygen becomes part of their routine.

Talking openly with family, friends or your healthcare team can help you adjust. Peer support groups can also provide reassurance from others who have had similar experiences. For more information on Peer Support visit **www.lungfoundation.com.au**.

Using oxygen does not define who you are. It is simply one part of managing your health so you can continue to engage in meaningful activities and maintain your quality of life.

Relationships, carers and intimacy

Being on oxygen therapy does not mean you will have to give up physical connection and sex. With good communication and a positive attitude many people using oxygen therapy continue to enjoy meaningful relationships.

Some tips to help maintain your sexual relationship:

- Plan intimate moments for when you feel your best, after morning medicine or later in the day when breathing feels easier
- If you feel more energised while using your oxygen, try using it during intimate moments
- There is no right or wrong way
- Some medications can impact intimacy, talk to your doctor about your medication and any side effects if you notice this.

Changes for carers and family members

Encourage your family or carers to learn about your oxygen equipment as much as possible. You might want to consider:

- Asking them to attend doctor's appointments with you where possible
- Showing them how to use your equipment and how to reorder it
- Ask for help organising and setting up your portable oxygen when you are planning travel, outings and activities.

Adjusting to oxygen therapy can change how roles are shared within relationships. Some people feel frustrated about needing help, whilst partners or carers may worry about doing the right thing. Open communication can help you all adapt.

If you spend time with grandchildren or young children, they may be curious about your oxygen equipment. Explaining in simple, reassuring language can help them feel comfortable. For example, you might say: *"This helps my lungs get enough air so I can keep doing things with you."*

Including children in normal routines – such as helping to carry light items or reminding you to bring your oxygen – can foster connection while helping them understand your needs.

Travelling with oxygen

Travelling while using oxygen therapy is possible for many people. It may take extra planning, but with the right preparation and support, you can still travel locally, interstate or overseas. **Before making travel plans, talk to your healthcare team and oxygen supplier.** Together, you can create a travel plan that suits your health needs, the equipment you'll need and where you're going.

As a guide, allow at least 4–6 weeks to prepare before travelling with oxygen.

Driving and travelling in a vehicle

Many people continue to travel in a vehicle while using oxygen therapy, either as a driver or passenger. This can help you stay independent and keep doing your usual activities. Travelling with oxygen is generally safe, but it does require some planning and care. Here are some important tips:

- For longer journeys, allow extra time for rest breaks. Make sure you have enough oxygen for the whole trip, including unexpected delays. Carry backup oxygen or spare batteries if needed.
- Take oxygen cylinders out of the vehicle when refuelling and move them away from the petrol pump area if you can. Oxygen increases fire risk, so avoid open flames, sparks or smoking near your equipment.
- Arrange the tubing carefully so it does not get in the way of the steering wheel, pedals or gear controls.
- Keep the equipment away from airbags and make sure air vents are not blocked.
- Keep the windows slightly open or use fresh-air ventilation to help reduce oxygen build-up inside the vehicle.
- When you reach your destination, take cylinders out of the car and place them in a cool, ventilated area.

Different oxygen equipment may have specific instructions, so check with your oxygen supplier if you are unsure. If you are driving, talk to your healthcare team about whether it is safe for you. Do not drive if you feel very breathless, dizzy or tired. You may also need to let your state licensing authority know if you have a medical condition that could affect driving.

Travelling by cruise ship

You may need to use a portable oxygen concentrator when travelling on a cruise ship, as it is usually not practical to take enough oxygen cylinders for the whole trip.

Before booking:

- Make sure the portable concentrator is suitable for your oxygen prescription
- Tell the cruise company that you will be bringing a portable oxygen concentrator and will need a continuous power supply that fits with your concentrator plug or adaptor
- Check that the cruise ship has oxygen available on board in case your equipment stops working
- Check with the cruise company if you need a medical clearance from your doctor.

Travelling by plane

Air travel requires extra planning if you have a lung condition, so it is important to speak with your GP or respiratory specialist **before** booking your trip. Most airlines require medical clearance before you can travel with oxygen. This may include:

- a medical certificate confirming you are fit to travel
- a completed airline medical clearance form
- details of your oxygen prescription and equipment
- confirmation of whether you will need oxygen during the flight.

Airline rules can vary and may change over time. Contact your airline **at least 4–6 weeks before travel** to check what they require. Your doctor, oxygen supplier or travel agent can help with completing the required paperwork, but speak with them early to understand what is needed and if there are any costs involved. Some airlines also charge fees for processing the paperwork or providing oxygen on board. Planning ahead can make your trip safer, more comfortable and less stressful.

Some people who do not usually need oxygen at home, may need extra oxygen when flying. This is because the air pressure in the plane is lower. Your doctor may arrange **High Altitude Simulation Testing (HAST)** to check if you need oxygen during the flight.

A **High-Altitude Simulation Test (HAST)**, or hypoxic challenge, checks whether you need oxygen when flying. You breathe air with lower oxygen levels, similar to being on a plane, for about 20–30 minutes while your oxygen saturation and heart rate are monitored.

If your oxygen levels drop too low (usually below 88–90%), you will be given oxygen to work out how much you will need during the flight.

The test usually takes 45–60 minutes. It is not recommended for people who have had a recent serious heart or blood vessel problem, such as a heart attack, stroke, unstable angina or a blood clot.

Take extra care when travelling with low-cost or code-share flights, as oxygen policies and support services may vary.

Air travel can feel complex when using oxygen therapy, but with early planning and clear communication with your healthcare team and airline, many people are able to travel safely.

Depending on the airline, you may be able to take your own portable oxygen concentrator or rent one for your trip. Make sure you:

- use a device that is approved for airline travel (often called FAA-approved)
- bring enough battery power to cover at least 1.5 times your total travel time, in case of delays
- check whether your airline provides oxygen on board (this is uncommon and may involve additional costs).

Make sure you always carry your essential medical information in your hand luggage along with your inhalers or medicines you require in case you lose your baggage or you require medical attention while in transit.

Key tips for travelling with oxygen

Discuss contingency plans in case of equipment malfunction.

Make a note of which electrical outlets and voltage your destination(s) use.

Ask your doctor for a brief medical history that you can take as a printout with you and request your doctor uploads your health summary to My Health Record so it can be accessed by you or other healthcare providers when overseas or domestically.

When choosing where to travel, think about how easy it will be to get medical care, how accessible your accommodation is and how you will organise your oxygen supply. Try to avoid places with high humidity, extreme temperatures (hot or cold), high pollution and high altitude as they can make it harder for you to breathe.

Exercise and staying active

Being active is an important part of managing your lung condition.

Physical activity can help:

- improve energy levels
- reduce breathlessness over time
- support heart and lung health
- build muscle strength
- improve mood and sleep
- help you stay independent in daily life.

It is safe to exercise while using oxygen. It is important to follow your healthcare team's advice about how much oxygen to use during activity. Always speak with your doctor, physiotherapist or pulmonary rehabilitation team before starting or changing your activity routine.

How to start exercising while using oxygen

If you're new to exercising with oxygen therapy, these tips can help you get started safely:

1 Start slowly

Begin with gentle activities such as sitting exercises, stretching or short walks. This helps you get used to moving while using oxygen.

2 Drink plenty of fluids

Oxygen therapy can make your airways feel dry. Drinking water before, during and after exercise may help.

3 Follow a plan

Do an exercise program recommended by a physiotherapist or a suitable home program for people using oxygen.

4 Pay attention to how you feel

Slow down or stop if you feel dizzy, very tired or more short of breath than usual. If these symptoms don't go away, speak to your doctor before continuing.

5 Check your oxygen levels during exercise if advised

Your healthcare team may recommend using a pulse oximeter (small finger monitor) during exercise to make sure your oxygen levels stay in a safe range.

Tips for exercising safely with oxygen

- Use your oxygen as prescribed
- Do not increase your oxygen flow rate unless advised by your health practitioner
- Keep oxygen tubing positioned safely to prevent trips or falls.

My medical details

Use the form to record important medical details. Ask your healthcare team to help you fill out any information you're unsure of. It may be helpful to copy this page and keep it with you at all times.

Make sure your My Health Record is up to date and includes your Advanced Care Plan if you have one.

In an emergency, please note:	
I use oxygen therapy	☐ Yes ☐ No
Usual oxygen flow rate (rest)	
Usual oxygen flow rate (activity)	
Usual oxygen flow rate (sleep)	
Oxygen delivery device	☐ Nasal prongs ☐ Mask ☐ Other:
Target oxygen saturation	
Lung condition(s)	
Other medical conditions	

Personal details	
Name	
Address	
Phone number	

Emergency contact	
Name	
Phone number	

Medical team	
GP name	
Phone number	
Respiratory specialist name	
Phone number	
Respiratory nurse name	
Phone number	

Current medicines		
Name	**Frequency**	**Dose**

My oxygen prescription		
When to use oxygen	**How long to use oxygen**	**What flow rate to use**
Example only: Daytime at rest	12 hours/all day	2 L/min

My oxygen prescription		
	Home oxygen concentrator	**Portable oxygen concentrator**
Oxygen supplier		
Supplier phone number		
Date of last equipment service		
Date tubing last replaced		
Date filter last replaced		
	Stationary cylinder	**Portable cylinder**
Oxygen supplier		
Supplier phone number		
Date of last equipment service		
Date tubing last replaced		
Date filter last replaced		

My backup plan/power failure plan is...

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