NHS
West Suffolk
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information

Oxygen therapy

Why might I need oxygen therapy?

Our bodies need a certain amount of oxygen to function properly. Oxygen is needed for many things such as helping with muscle function, digesting food and for helping our brains to think!

If you have a long-term lung condition you may struggle to get enough oxygen into your body because of irreversible damage to your lung tissue, increased lung stiffness, or because your lungs produce a lot of phlegm. All of these problems can reduce your lungs ability to take up enough oxygen to supply your internal organs. Some conditions where you may need oxygen therapy include:

- COPD or emphysema
- Interstitial lung disease or lung fibrosis
- Bronchiectasis
- Lung cancer
- Pulmonary hypertension
- Severe heart disease

Oxygen levels that remain low for long periods of time can be dangerous and can make you very poorly. If your oxygen levels in your blood are too low then you may be referred for an assessment for possible oxygen therapy.

Symptoms of low oxygen levels include persistent headaches, dizziness, high blood pressure, increased breathlessness and confusion.

Oxygen therapy assessment

You may be referred for an oxygen assessment by your GP, hospital doctor, practice

Putting you first

nurse, physiotherapist or respiratory nurse.

An appointment will be made for you to be assessed either at home or at your nearest oxygen therapy clinic. You may attend this with a friend or relative if you wish.

- On arrival the health professional assessing you will need to ask you about your medical history and what medication you take (it may be a good idea to take a list of these with you).

- Next they will check your oxygen levels by using a pulse oximeter, a small device which can be placed on your finger.

- Sometimes they may also need you to have a blood test. This measures accurately how much carbon dioxide and oxygen are in your blood, which shows how well your lungs are working.

- You may then be asked to carry out a walk test to see what happens to your oxygen levels. This walk test may then be repeated with oxygen therapy in place to see if this improves your oxygen levels when moving about.

At the end of the assessment you should be given your oxygen prescription which will tell you when you need to use your oxygen and for how long. Arrangements will then be made for your oxygen to be delivered to your home.

Types of oxygen therapy

There are several different kinds of oxygen therapy:

- **Long term oxygen therapy (LTOT):** used to stabilise oxygen levels for 15 hours or more a day

- **Nocturnal oxygen therapy (NOT):** used to improve oxygen levels when you are asleep

- **Ambulatory oxygen therapy (AOT):** used to improve oxygen levels when you are walking about or exercising

- **Palliative oxygen therapy (POT):** used to manage severe breathlessness that does not respond to other treatments

You will be told at your assessment which type of oxygen therapy you will need.

Please be aware that **oxygen is a prescribed drug**. It is vitally important that you use

it as you have been prescribed, in order to gain the best results. **Too much oxygen can be as dangerous as too little.**

If you experience new symptoms of headache, a faster than normal pulse rate, disorientation or confusion when using your oxygen you must tell your Respiratory Nurse or GP immediately, or go to the Emergency Department.

After your initial assessment you must be re-assessed regularly as your oxygen prescription may need to be adjusted according to your needs. The health professional assessing you will arrange your next appointment with you.

How is oxygen delivered?

Oxygen cylinders: These are the most common form of providing oxygen therapy and come in various sizes. They are easy to use and are portable so can be taken anywhere. They can be used with nasal cannulae or a face mask depending on what is most comfortable for the user.

Oxygen concentrators: These are usually supplied for your home if you need to use oxygen for long periods of time (day or night). These machines provide a constant supply of oxygen that never runs out. The machine does this by filtering the oxygen from room air and then delivering it to the user via nasal cannulae or a face mask.

Oxygen trolleys: Most portable oxygen cylinders are supplied with a rucksack style carrier to make it easier to manage. However, the average oxygen cylinder (when full) weighs approx. 2kg. If you find this too heavy then ask your supplier if you can be issued with a trolley instead.

Important things to check with your portable oxygen cylinder

Always make sure that your oxygen cylinder is full before you leave home. The indicator arm should be pointing to the green portion of the dial. It is always good to take a spare cylinder with you.

Before using the oxygen cylinder you need to make sure that the black valve is completely open. It must be turned to the right (clockwise) as far as it will go. Failure to do this will restrict the flow of oxygen to the user and could make them unwell.

Next, attach the oxygen tubing o the cylinder. Make sure it is firmly in place and that there are no kinks in the tubing - any kinks will restrict the oxygen flow to the user.

Finally, turn the dial on the top of the cylinder to the number of litres you have been prescribed (ie. 2 for 2 litres). Some oxygen cylinders only go up in even numbers. In this case, for example, to set it up for 3 litres you will need to set the dial to the red area between 2 and 4 litres.

Smoking and oxygen therapy

Oxygen is a highly flammable gas, so it is vitally important that you should **NOT** smoke cigarettes, vapes/e-cigarettes or use naked flames near oxygen or the cylinders.

Choosing to ignore this advice could cause serious burns to the user and in some circumstances cause an explosion which could put yourself and those around you in danger.

If you continue to smoke whilst using your oxygen, then your oxygen may be legally removed or withheld from you for the safety of others.

Other dangers

You should not use flammable liquids (cleaning fluids) or oil based emollients (Vaseline) near oxygen.

Home and car insurance

If you are prescribed oxygen therapy then it is important that you inform your insurance company.

This should not affect your insurance premiums, but will mean that you should be fully covered in the event of a claim.

For the same reason it is also important to inform your car insurance company if you are transporting or using oxygen in your car. However, you do not need to let the DVLA know unless you suffer with dizziness or fainting episodes.

Always make sure that oxygen cylinders are secured safely in your car. They can make dangerous missiles in the event of an accident!

Oxygen and holidays

Having to use oxygen should not restrict you holidaying in the UK, but there are a few checks you should carry out first:

- Check that hotels etc are happy to accommodate you if you use oxygen and that they are happy to store your equipment and cylinders.

- Make sure that your oxygen provider can deliver oxygen to your UK holiday destination. Most providers are happy to do so, but you will need to give them plenty of notice (usually about 6 weeks, especially at busy times like Easter and Christmas).

You will need to give your provider details such as dates and where you are staying.

Holidaying abroad: If you are planning to fly abroad then you may need to have a 'Fitness to Fly' test prior to going. Flying at a higher altitude can reduce your body's ability to take up enough oxygen and could be dangerous. Your GP should be able to help you organise this test.

Always check with individual airlines as to their policies for supplying you with oxygen during the flight.

If you need oxygen during your holiday abroad then you will need to arrange oxygen availability with your holiday destination as UK oxygen providers **do not** allow their equipment to be taken out of the UK. You will need to organise and pay for this yourself.

If travelling to Europe you also will need a valid European Health Insurance Card (EHIC).

Important advice and regular checks

- Always make sure that your oxygen cylinders are stored in an upright position.
- Make sure that you have smoke detectors fitted in your home.
- You must inform the fire brigade that you have oxygen being used and stored at your property.
- If you hear any hissing noises when you turn on your oxygen device, or you can feel oxygen escaping, please turn off the device immediately and call your provider.
- Clean your nasal cannulae, or mask, regularly (at least twice per week) and change them approximately every two weeks. If you have a cold or chest infection then this procedure should be carried out more frequently.
- Make sure that you have plenty of reserve portable oxygen cylinders. Your suppliers will always try to deliver as soon as possible, but occasionally there can be unforeseen delays.

Useful contact numbers

Home oxygen suppliers:

- **BOC**: covers the East and North-East of England and Northern Ireland
  Call: 0800 136 603

- **Dolby Vivisol:** covers the South of England
  Call: 0500 823 773
  Dolby Vivisol also covers Scotland
  Call 0800 833531

- **Baywater Healthcare:** covers Yorkshire and Humberside, West Midlands and Wales.
  Call: 0800 373 580

- **Air Liquide** - suppliers of liquid oxygen
  0808 143 9991 for London
  0808 143 9992 for North-West England
  0808 143 9993 for East Midlands
  0808 143 9999 for South-West England

The British Lung Foundation also have a friendly team who would be happy to answer any questions that you may have on oxygen, oxygen suppliers and travelling with oxygen. They can be contacted on:

Tel: 03000 030 555 or

Helpline@blf.org.uk

Physiotherapy Department
West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust
Hardwick Lane, Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk, IP33 2QZ

Tel: 01284 713300

Suffolk Community Healthcare Care Co-ordination Centre (CCC)
Tel: 0300 123 2425

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (the new name for DisabledGo)
https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust

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