

Managing the effects of on the body

Managing your oxygen

Why have I got to have oxygen at home?

Many people treated with oxygen whilst in hospital are discharged home without oxygen.

Some people will continue to require additional oxygen when they go home to support their lungs and their heart. The amount (flow rate), the number of hours each day and the equipment you have will be set up specifically for you. It is important that you do not change the amount or setting on the equipment and you use it for the number of hours prescribed.

You may need to use oxygen all day every day, with short breaks or you may only need to use your oxygen for activity such as washing, dressing or moving around.

How might the oxygen be delivered?

- Oxygen that is required most of the day, every day is usually delivered from an oxygen concentrator. This is a machine that plugs in and filters the room air and 'concentrates' the oxygen in it for you to breathe. Your home oxygen provider will give you information on how to switch the machine on and off and any simple maintenance such as washing filters, if needed.
- Almost everyone that has an oxygen machine will also have a large cylinder to act as a 'back-up', if your machine is not working, such as in the event of a power failure.
- You may only require oxygen when you move around or do activity. This is often termed 'ambulatory oxygen' and is usually provided by small portable cylinders or a small, rechargeable oxygen machine.

What does this mean for me?

Most people who have oxygen at home continue to lead a normal life. If you find having oxygen is limiting you, discuss your concerns/issues with your nurse, doctor or oxygen physiologist.

Safety

Please ensure you read the health and safety information given to you by your Oxygen Team and your oxygen provider.

Your local fire service may be able to provide you with specific advice about your home. Some things you should remember are:

- Oxygen will make things burn more easily, therefore no one should smoke (including E-Cigarettes / Vaping) near oxygen.
- Oxygen should not be used near any kind of naked flames (including gas cookers).
- Be careful not to trip over the oxygen tubing as it can be difficult to see.
- It is important to inform your car and household insurance providers that you have oxygen at home. This should not affect premiums but will ensure you are covered in the event of a claim.
- If your nose or lips become dry or sore, please use only water based products. Products such as petroleum jelly should be avoided. If you are unsure, please discuss with your doctor, nurse, oxygen physiologist or pharmacist.

Travel

If you are travelling by car, ensure any portable oxygen equipment is safely secured in the boot, behind the front seats or strapped in the back seat of the vehicle.

All travel plans should be in accordance with current Government guidance and you should make yourself familiar with this, as it may change quickly. If you are able and planning to travel in the UK or abroad, it is sensible to check with your Oxygen Team for advice about this.

Will the oxygen make me feel less breathless?

Generally, oxygen is not a very effective treatment for breathlessness. However, if you have been assessed as requiring oxygen to help your heart and lungs you may find that you are able to do a little more before you feel breathless and that you recover more quickly after activity.

Being breathless does not necessarily mean that you require oxygen as there are often several reasons for this, including something called 'deconditioning'. If you previously had oxygen at home before you had COVID, you may find that the medical team alter your oxygen equipment, flow rate or number of hours you need to use the oxygen.

What if my oxygen levels fall at home?

For most patients discharged home with oxygen, the prescribed oxygen flow rate will keep their oxygen levels in a safe range. If you have your own oxygen monitoring device at home (a pulse oximeter), you can monitor your oxygen levels or oxygen saturation at home. Oxygen saturation refers to the amount of oxygen that is in your bloodstream. A pulse oximeter device clips on your finger and shines a red light through your finger to measure your oxygen saturation. Normal pulse oximetry values range from 95 to 100%. When you were discharged from hospital, you may have been advised of your 'target' oxygen saturations. This is usually given as a

range i.e. target saturation between 88-92% and is based on information about your breathing while you were in hospital.

If your oxygen saturations are above or below your target saturations, you should contact your doctor, nurse or a member of your Oxygen Team for advice. Even if you do not have a pulse oximeter, you should also contact them if you:

- Feel more short of breath.
- Have a headache, particularly in the morning.
- You feel unusually restless.
- You experience dizziness.
- Your breathing is more rapid.
- You feel confused or you are finding it hard to concentrate.

How will I know when I don't need to use the oxygen anymore?

Like many other medications that are prescribed when you leave hospital, oxygen therapy can help you get better. But after you recover, if you didn't have oxygen before then you may no longer need the extra oxygen.

Continuing with oxygen when you no longer need it does not have any benefits to your health.

You should receive a follow up appointment approximately 6-12 weeks after you are discharged from hospital to check if you need to continue with oxygen at home. This may be a face-to-face appointment but could be a telephone consultation or a video consultation depending on the local restrictions due to COVID.

If it is a face-to face visit, your oxygen levels will be measured (usually using a device placed on your finger). You may be asked to walk around, to observe your blood oxygen levels. The Oxygen Team may also need to take a small blood sample from the artery in your wrist or from your earlobe to accurately measure your blood oxygen levels and also the levels of a gas called carbon dioxide, to help refine the delivery of oxygen for you.