Oxygen to relieve symptoms at home



Registered Charity No. 254402

14-0225-0228-HMC

Our specialist Palliative Care Community team have decided that you might benefit from oxygen therapy at home, and after a thorough assessment of your individual needs, and any safety concerns, you will have had some oxygen equipment installed at home.

This leaflet has been developed as a guide to give you some useful information about having oxygen at home.

What is breathlessness?

Breathlessness, or shortness of breath, is an individual experience where you feel uncomfortably aware of your breathing. It is a complex symptom that can be affected by many things and is closely linked to anxiety, emotions and fear, environmental factors, fatigue, weakness of the respiratory muscles, and performing activities.

Breathlessness can be acute, in an emergency, or chronic and gradually worsening in severity. It can be continuous or it can come and go (episodic).

How will I get the oxygen and what equipment will I receive?

Your oxygen equipment will be installed by a Technician (from Baywater Healthcare), a specialist supplier of home oxygen covering South Yorkshire.

You may have been given either a portable oxygen concentrator which is powered by a rechargeable battery, portable oxygen cylinders, which are replaced once empty, or, a large, static concentrator which uses electricity. The Technician will have advised the best place to keep your oxygen equipment and have explained how to use it.

An oxygen concentrator is a small machine, about the size of a small suitcase, that is plugged into an electric socket and is powered by electricity. The concentrator takes room air and passes it through a filter to provide a higher concentration of oxygen. The cost of the electricity used by the machine will be reimbursed by Baywater, this does not include the cost of a portable oxygen concentrator.

You will have also been given a large back up cylinder in case of a power cut. This is not portable and should not be moved or used unless it is an emergency.

Oxygen cylinders are specialised containers which contain compressed oxygen. They contain a fixed amount of oxygen which will need to be replaced when it has run out.

The oxygen is usually delivered via nasal cannulas, which are 2 prongs that go up your nose. Occasionally we can organise an oxygen mask but this can affect your ability to eat, drink and talk and can cause a dry, sore throat.

How much oxygen do I need?

This will have been decided by the team who organised your oxygen, and will be individual to your needs. Some people will be given oxygen to use it for short periods during the day when doing activities, while others may use it longer periods during the day or night. You may find it helpful when you are doing an activity like getting washed and dressed, walking around or going out.

Oxygen should be thought of as a drug, and the prescription should be used accurately. The oxygen flow rate setting you have been given should not be changed without speaking to your health professional, the home oxygen team, or St Luke's Community team.

Can oxygen be harmful?

Generally oxygen is safe when it is used properly. Sometimes when oxygen is used, nasal dryness can occur. This may be treated with water based lubricants like KY gel.

You should never use any oil, paraffin or petroleum-based products, including some lips salves, emollients, alcohol gels and sunscreens on your face or nose, such as Vaseline, as they can increase the risk of fire in the presence of oxygen.

Occasionally some people may develop problems associated with the retention of carbon dioxide, the waste gas that we breathe out. Symptoms to watch out for include a morning headache on waking, being unable to 'think straight', unexplained confusion or drowsiness.

You will need to contact your GP, the home oxygen service or the St Luke's Community team if you experience any of these symptoms, as you may have too much carbon dioxide in your blood.

If you feel extremely unwell please call 999.

How to care for your oxygen equipment

Wipe down your concentrator every week with a damp cloth, ensuring that it has been turned off. Change the air filter at the back of the concentrator weekly, and wash the old filter in warm soapy water, rinse and allow this to dry naturally.

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Check your nasal cannula or mask frequently and ensure that it is clean and not blocked. Change your nasal cannula or mask every 6 weeks, or after every chest infection. Baywater can be contacted to supply any additional filters or consumables.

Who should I inform that I now have oxygen?

You can inform your electricity supplier if you have a concentrator, as they will put you on a priority list should there be a power cut. Also inform your house insurance company and your car insurance company if you are travelling with oxygen. This should not affect your premium.

Oxygen safety

To keep you and your family safe, please use your oxygen correctly.

Do not smoke, vape or let anyone else smoke or use e-cigarettes near you when you are using your oxygen. Smoking is dangerous when using oxygen.

Materials will burn faster when in contact with oxygen. This includes reusable and disposable electronic cigarettes, cigars, pipes etc. There have been incidents where e-cigarettes have exploded or ignited whilst being recharged in oxygen rich environments. Oxygen cylinders will not be supplied to households with smokers.

Keep away from naked flames
All oxygen equipment should be kept away from naked flames including birthday and scented candles, open fires and gas cookers.

Keep away from heat
Oxygen helps fires to burn more fiercely and is not explosive. Keep your oxygen equipment away from cookers, heaters, hairdryers, hair straighteners, electronic devices like phones or laptops etc.

Turn it off
Oxygen can build up in material and make it more flammable if your mask or cannula are left in your lap, or on the bed for any length of time. Always turn it off when it is not in use.

Smoke alarms
Ensure you have working smoke alarms in your property. Baywater will notify the local Fire and Rescue service that you have oxygen equipment. If there are any safety concerns, the Fire and Rescue service will arrange to visit your home to complete a fire safety check. The Fire Safety team will also replace any faulty alarms, free of charge.

Is there any other equipment available?

There is other equipment that can be considered to help you manage your oxygen equipment safely at home.

Portable equipment can also be ordered to allow you to use your oxygen outside the home. Please contact the home oxygen service to discuss this.

- Trolleys and backpacks to carry oxygen cylinders can be provided
- Portable, transportable concentrators or liquid oxygen.
- Conserving devices – these attach to a portable cylinder to make the supply of oxygen last longer by giving a pulse of oxygen when you breathe. Although it makes the oxygen last longer, it is not suitable for everyone so, please ask your nurse about this during your oxygen assessment.
- Long tubing can be fixed around the floor or skirting boards, upstairs and downstairs, allowing the oxygen to be piped in, and additional concentrators can be installed, to reduce trips and falls for people who are visually impaired or have mobility difficulties.
- Green 'high visibility' tubing can be used to reduce falls and trips for people with visual impairment.

What else can help me with my breathlessness?

Fan therapy / open window
Using a standing, desk or hand-held fan moving air across the face and the nerves can make it easier to breathe.

Medication
Using low doses of oral morphine can relieve the sensation of breathlessness. Benzodiazepines like Diazepam and Lorazepam can be helpful in treating anxiety and reducing breathlessness. Bronchodilators like Salbutamol relax the airways to allow more air into the lungs.

Controlled breathing
Using breathing techniques and diaphragmatic breathing can help breathlessness.

Pursed lip breathing can help get more oxygen into your lungs and calm down your breathing. Sit in a chair and relax your neck and shoulder muscles. Breathe in slowly through your nose for 2 counts, making sure your mouth is closed, then 'pucker' or 'purse' your lips as if you are going to whistle and breathe out slowly.

Relaxation / visualisation
Sit forwards and rest your arms on a table, with your wrists relaxed. This helps the chest muscles to relax and allows more air to move into the lungs. Thinking of a place that makes you happy can help breathlessness.

Energy conservation
Plan your activities so that you can have time to rest in between. Prioritise the most important activities. Pace yourself.

FAB Group
Understanding and Managing Fatigue, Anxiety and Breathlessness (FAB) group. The group helps attendees with breathlessness to understand their symptoms and learn ways to manage these with the aim of achieving the best quality of life. The sessions also provide the opportunity to share experiences with and gain support from other participants. The group is led by the Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Nurse team, and runs on Thursday mornings at our Little Common Lane site.

Will I receive any follow up once I have oxygen at home?

You may not receive regular follow up appointments when you have been started on oxygen to help with the relief of your symptoms.

However, this will be decided depending upon your individual condition and circumstances.

The Home oxygen service welcomes you to contact a member of the team if you have any concerns about your oxygen therapy and wish to discuss this. Alternatively contact the St Luke's team.

Baywater Healthcare will check and service all equipment and are available to contact for all concerns relating to this, or to replace your current oxygen supply.

If you are not using your oxygen appropriately, or are using it in an unsafe manner, Baywater will notify the home oxygen service and these concerns will need to be investigated. Your oxygen equipment could be withdrawn or withheld if the safety concerns pose a risk to yourself or others. Please contact your oxygen supplier to have oxygen delivered to alternative address/s when travelling away from home.

Contact details

St Luke's Community team:

- 0114 235 7494

Baywater Healthcare:

- 0800 373 580 available 24 hours a day.
- www.baywater.co.uk

Sheffield Home oxygen service:

- 0114 226 9175 or 0114 226 9207
  Available Monday to Friday, 8.00am - 4.30pm (not bank holidays).

Stop smoking service / Yorkshire SmokeFree

- 0800 612 0011 (free from landlines)
- 0330 660 1166 (free from mobiles)

British Lung Foundation Helpline

- 03000 030555
- www.blf.org.uk

Information taken from Sheffield Teaching Hospital Oxygen to relieve symptoms at home information document