

Date: 5/27/2008 Patient: Elizabeth Test

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## Using Oxygen at Home

### Why do I need to use oxygen?

If you have chronic lung disease, your health care provider may prescribe oxygen. Examples of chronic lung diseases are asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, lung cancer, cystic fibrosis, and heart failure.

Oxygen therapy can help you:

- Breathe better.
- Sleep better.
- Feel better.
- Be more alert.
- Have more stamina.
- Lead a more normal life.

Oxygen at very high levels over a long time can be dangerous, which is why you need a prescription from your health care provider. The prescription will spell out how much oxygen you need per minute (flow rate) and when you need to use oxygen. Some people need oxygen therapy only when they exercise or while they sleep. Others need to use oxygen around the clock. Your health care provider will measure the level of oxygen in your blood to see how much oxygen you need.

### How can I get oxygen?

There are 3 ways to get oxygen at home:

- Tanks of compressed gas. Oxygen gas is stored under pressure in large, heavy tanks or small, portable tanks. The large tanks are kept at home, while the small tanks can be carried with you.
- Tanks of liquid oxygen. Oxygen is stored in these tanks as a very cold liquid. The liquid changes to a gas when it is released from the tank. Liquid oxygen is more expensive than the compressed gas, but it takes up less space and is easy to transfer to portable tanks.
- Oxygen concentrator. This is an electric device that separates the oxygen out of the air and concentrates it. It is not as costly as liquid oxygen, but you must have a tank of oxygen as a backup in case of a power failure.

You breathe oxygen from the tank or concentrator in 1 of 3 ways:

- A nasal cannula is soft, plastic tubing that rests on your ears. Two thin prongs fit just inside your nostrils.
- A mask that fits over your nose and mouth may work best if you need a high flow of oxygen.
- Transtracheal oxygen therapy requires the insertion of a small flexible catheter in your trachea (windpipe). The transtracheal catheter is held in place by a necklace. A humidifier is usually needed with transtracheal oxygen.

### What special precautions do I need to take?

Pure oxygen is a fire hazard. Keep a fire extinguisher close by, and let your fire department know that you have oxygen in your home. Oxygen makes any fire burn faster and hotter. Keep flammable items away from the oxygen supply, such as:

- alcohol
- aerosol sprays
- cleaning fluid, paint thinner, or other solvents
- perfumes
- petroleum products such as gasoline or oil.

Keep oxygen at least 5 feet away from sources of flames, sparks, or high heat. Examples include:

- cigarettes
- gas stoves and heaters
- candles
- lighted fireplaces.

**Never smoke while you are using oxygen.** Warn visitors not to smoke near you when you are using oxygen.

The highest safe temperature for the oxygen tank and accessories is 125°F (52° C).

Take precautions to prevent leaks from tanks of oxygen. If you need oxygen at home, a technician will help you set up your system. Always follow instructions for attaching the regulator. The tanks should be secured so that they do not fall over. Carefully seal them whenever they are not in use. The company that supplies your home oxygen will assist you with a setup and delivery schedule for bringing replacement tanks to your home.

If you use a concentrator, tell your electric company so you will be given priority for repairs if there is a power failure. Clean the air filter on the concentrator at least once a week.

## **What else do I need to know if I am using oxygen at home?**

- Wash cannulas or masks once or twice a week. Use liquid soap and rinse thoroughly. Change to a new cannula or mask every 2 to 4 weeks.
- If you are using a transtracheal catheter, check with your health care provider to learn how to clean your catheter and humidifier bottle.
- Oxygen therapy dries the inside of your nose and mouth. Use water-based lubricants such as KY Jelly on your lips or in your nose. Don't use an oil-based product, such as petroleum jelly.
- Make sure you have good dental and gum care.
- To keep your cheeks or the skin behind your ears from becoming irritated, tuck some gauze under the tubing.
- Do not drink alcohol. It may slow your breathing rate. It may also cause you to forget the rules for being safe with oxygen.
- Make sure your health care provider knows all the medicines and supplements you are taking.
- Do not change the flow of oxygen without your health care provider's approval. Too much oxygen does not help. It can cause you to breathe too slowly, which allows too much carbon dioxide to build up in your blood. Too little oxygen can worsen shortness of breath and be harmful. Talk with your provider if you think your oxygen level needs to be adjusted.

- You can travel with oxygen, but will need a special small tank. Talk with your provider about your options.
- Call your health care provider if:
  - You have a lot of headaches.
  - You feel more nervous than usual.
  - Your lips or fingernails are blue.
  - You have unusual drowsiness or confusion.
  - Your breathing is slow, shallow, difficult, or irregular.
- Call your health care provider or your oxygen supplier if you have any questions about oxygen safety.

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