

# Home Oxygen Use, Adult

When a medical condition keeps you from getting enough oxygen, your health care provider may instruct you to take extra oxygen at home. Your health care provider will let you know:

- When to take oxygen.
- For how long to take oxygen.
- How quickly oxygen should be delivered (*flow rate*), in liters per minute (LPM or L/M).



Home oxygen can be given through:

- A mask.
- A nasal cannula. This is a device or tube that goes in the nostrils.
- A transtracheal catheter. This is a small, flexible tube placed in the trachea.
- A tracheostomy. This is a surgically made opening in the trachea.

These devices are connected with tubing to an oxygen source, such as:

- A tank. Tanks hold oxygen in gas form. They must be replaced when the oxygen is used up.
- A liquid oxygen device. This holds oxygen in liquid form. It must be replaced when the oxygen is used up.
- An oxygen concentrator machine. This filters oxygen in the room. It uses electricity, so you must have a backup cylinder of oxygen in case the power goes out.

## Supplies needed:

To use oxygen, you will need:

- A mask, nasal cannula, transtracheal catheter, or tracheostomy.
- An oxygen tank, a liquid oxygen device, or an oxygen concentrator.
- The tape that your health care provider recommends (optional).

If you use a transtracheal catheter and your prescribed flow rate is 1 LPM or greater, you will also need a humidifier.

## Risks and complications

- Fire. This can happen if the oxygen is exposed to a heat source, flame, or spark.
- Injury to skin. This can happen if liquid oxygen touches your skin.
- Organ damage. This can happen if you get too little oxygen.

## How to use oxygen

Your health care provider or a representative from your medical device company will show you how to use your oxygen device. Follow her or his instructions.

The instructions may look something like this:

1. Wash your hands.
2. If you use an oxygen concentrator, make sure it is plugged in.
3. Place one end of the tube into the port on the tank, device, or machine.



4. Place the mask over your nose and mouth. Or, place the nasal cannula and secure it with tape if instructed. If you use a tracheostomy or transtracheal catheter, connect it to the oxygen source as directed.
5. Make sure the liter-flow setting on the machine is at the level prescribed by your health care provider.
6. Turn on the machine or adjust the knob on the tank or device to the correct liter-flow setting.
7. When you are done, turn off and unplug the machine, or turn the knob to OFF.

## How to clean and care for the oxygen supplies

### Nasal cannula

- Clean it with a warm, wet cloth daily or as needed.
- Wash it with a liquid soap once a week.
- Rinse it thoroughly once or twice a week.
- Replace it every 2–4 weeks.
- If you have an infection, such as a cold or pneumonia, change the cannula when you get better.

### Mask

- Replace it every 2–4 weeks.
- If you have an infection, such as a cold or pneumonia, change the mask when you get better.

### Humidifier bottle

- Wash the bottle between each refill:
  - Wash it with soap and warm water.
  - Rinse it thoroughly.
  - Disinfect it and its top.
  - Air-dry it.
- Make sure it is dry before you refill it.

### Oxygen concentrator

- Clean the air filter at least twice a week according to directions from your home medical equipment and service company.
- Wipe down the cabinet every day. To do this:
  - Unplug the unit.
  - Wipe down the cabinet with a damp cloth.
  - Dry the cabinet.

### Other equipment

- Change any extra tubing every 1–3 months.
- Follow instructions from your health care provider about taking care of any other equipment.

## Safety tips

### Fire safety tips

- Keep your oxygen and oxygen supplies at least 5 ft away from sources of heat, flames, and sparks at all times.
- **Do not** allow smoking near your oxygen. Put up "no smoking" signs in your home. Avoid smoking areas when in public.



- **Do not** use materials that can burn (are *flammable*) while you use oxygen.
- When you go to a restaurant with portable oxygen, ask to be seated in the nonsmoking section.
- Keep a fire extinguisher close by. Let your fire department know that you have oxygen in your home.
- Test your home smoke detectors regularly.

## Traveling

- Secure your oxygen tank in the vehicle so that it does not move around. Follow instructions from your medical device company about how to safely secure your tank.
- Make sure you have enough oxygen for the amount of time you will be away from home.
- If you are planning air travel, contact the airline to find out if they allow the use of an approved portable oxygen concentrator. You may also need documents from your health care provider and medical device company before you travel.

## General safety tips

- If you use an oxygen cylinder, make sure it is in a stand or secured to an object that will not move (*fixed object*).
- If you use liquid oxygen, make sure its container is kept upright.
- If you use an oxygen concentrator:
  - Tell your electric company. Make sure you are given priority service in the event that your power goes out.
  - Avoid using extension cords, if possible.

## Follow these instructions at home:

- Use oxygen only as told by your health care provider.
- **Do not** use alcohol or other drugs that make you relax (*sedating drugs*) unless instructed. They can slow down your breathing rate and make it hard to get in enough oxygen.
- Know how and when to order a refill of oxygen.
- Always keep a spare tank of oxygen. Plan ahead for holidays when you may not be able to get a prescription filled.
- Use water-based lubricants on your lips or nostrils. **Do not** use oil-based products like petroleum jelly.
- To prevent skin irritation on your cheeks or behind your ears, tuck some gauze under the tubing.

## Contact a health care provider if:

- You get headaches often.
- You have shortness of breath.
- You have a lasting cough.
- You have anxiety.
- You are sleepy all the time.
- You develop an illness that affects your breathing.
- You cannot exercise at your regular level.
- You are restless.
- You have difficult or irregular breathing, and it is getting worse.
- You have a fever.
- You have persistent redness under your nose.

## **Get help right away if:**

- You are confused.
- You have blue lips or fingernails.
- You are struggling to breathe.

## **Summary**

- Your health care provider or a representative from your medical device company will show you how to use your oxygen device. Follow her or his instructions.
- If you use an oxygen concentrator, make sure it is plugged in.
- Make sure the liter-flow setting on the machine is at the level prescribed by your health care provider.
- Keep your oxygen and oxygen supplies at least 5 ft away from sources of heat, flames, and sparks at all times.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.