

What is Oxygen Therapy?

If the oxygen in your blood is too low, using extra oxygen can help you feel better, stay more active, and improve your daily life. Oxygen therapy is used to help people when their blood is not able to get enough oxygen from breathing only air.

There are many health problems that can make it hard for your lungs to work properly. How much oxygen you need and how long you need it will depend on your health. Some people only need oxygen for a few weeks or months. Others may need it for the rest of their lives. Your doctor will decide how much oxygen you need by doing tests, like checking your oxygen levels through a finger sensor or a blood test. Oxygen is given in “liters per minute,” and your doctor will also tell you how many hours a day to use it.

If you only need oxygen when you are active - like walking or doing things around the house - it will be prescribed for use during those times only.

How Do I Get Oxygen Therapy?

Your doctor will order oxygen therapy for you if you need it. A nurse or respiratory therapist will do a test called an Oxygen Saturation Study to see if you qualify. If the results show you need oxygen at home, your doctor will apply to the Home Oxygen Program (HOP) for you.

If you qualify for home oxygen, the HOP will pay for your oxygen. If you have extended health benefits, they may pay for parts of your oxygen therapy.

How to Use Oxygen Therapy at Home

Your Oxygen Supply

Oxygen can be brought to your home in tanks or made by a machine called an oxygen concentrator. This machine turns regular air into oxygen for you to breathe.

Someone from an oxygen supply company will visit your home to set up the equipment and teach you how to use it safely.

1. Oxygen tanks: These come in two types:
 - **Compressed oxygen gas** is stored in metal tanks of different sizes.



- Small tanks are good for going out.
- Large tanks are heavy and stay in your home.

- **Liquid oxygen** is another form of oxygen that takes up less space and weighs less. These tanks hold more oxygen and are easier to carry, which is helpful if you are active.



2. Oxygen concentrator: This is a machine that runs on electricity. It pulls in air from the room, separates oxygen, and gives it to you through a tube.

- **Home concentrators** are bigger and stay in one place for daily use
- **Portable concentrators** are small, light, and run on batteries. They are great for travel or moving around more easily.



Tips for at Home:

- Do not change the oxygen setting without talking to your doctor first. Oxygen is like medicine, and changing the flow rate - either higher or lower - can be harmful to your body.
- Make sure to check how much oxygen is left in your tank. Be sure you have enough to last until your next scheduled delivery. If you run out and need an extra delivery, there may be an extra cost.
- Call your doctor or visit your nearest emergency room if you feel:
 - Short of breath
 - Restless or confused
 - Very tired
 - Like you are not getting enough oxygen
- The oxygen supply company will give you easy-to-follow instructions on how to use, clean, and take care of your equipment at home. They will also go over the different types of accessories with you.

Safety Tips

Oxygen can make fires start more easily and burn faster and hotter. Even things that don't normally catch fire can burn quickly when oxygen is around.

To stay safe:

- **Never smoke** or let anyone else smoke while using oxygen. Put up **"No Smoking"** signs and stay away from people who are smoking when you are outside your home.
- **Keep oxygen at least 3 meters (10 feet) away** from flames or heat, like gas stoves, barbecues, space heaters, candles, and fireplaces.
- **Do not use flammable, greasy, or oily products**, like petroleum jelly, cleaning sprays, paint thinners, hand lotions, or aerosol sprays when using oxygen. These can catch fire easily.
- **Keep a fire extinguisher** in your home where you can reach it quickly. If there is ever a fire or emergency, tell the fire department that you have oxygen in your home.
- **Do not store your compressor unit in a small storage area.** The extra heat generated could damage the unit and other materials in your storage area. It also requires adequate air ventilation to operate properly.
- **Keep the compressor at least 12 to 18 inches** away from drapes, bedspreads, walls, or any other item that might block the inlet ports. If the concentrator is too noisy, place it in a nearby room.

Travel Tips

Plan ahead to make sure your trip goes smoothly and safely:

1. **Talk to your doctor** before you travel. Ask if it's safe for you to go and how to stay healthy during your trip. Carry a copy of your oxygen prescription with you.
2. **Let your home oxygen company know** about your travel plans. Your supplier may be able to help you get oxygen at your destination.
3. **Tell the travel company** - like the airline, cruise ship, train, or bus - well ahead of time that you will be traveling with oxygen. They may have special rules or need time to get things ready for you.
4. **Make sure you or someone traveling with you** knows how to use your portable oxygen tank, how long it will last, and how to change or refill it if needed.
5. **Get a portable oxygen concentrator** if your doctor recommends it. These are small machines that make oxygen and are easy to carry. Some types can be used while flying or on the go. Learn how to use it before your trip.

Important Contact Information

BC Cancer Provincial Nurse Line: 1-833-818-ONCO (6626)

- Call your BC Cancer health care team if you start feeling unwell or notice any side effects.

Oxygen Suppliers:

- Call your oxygen supplier if you have any questions about your oxygen equipment, supplies, or delivery.
 - Vital Aire: 1-833-904-2473
 - MedPro Respiratory Care: 1-888-310-1444