

StChristopher's

Information about oxygen

**INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS,
CARERS AND FAMILIES**

1 Why have I been given oxygen?

Oxygen is vital for our bodies and having low oxygen levels can make you feel very unwell. There are many causes of low oxygen levels: for example, chronic lung diseases, pneumonia and blood clots in the lungs.

Oxygen is not very successful at treating feelings of breathlessness. Also, feeling breathless does not always mean oxygen levels are low. Please see our *Coping with breathlessness* leaflet for more information on managing breathlessness.

Oxygen is a medicine and must be prescribed by a doctor or specialist nurse. At the hospice, low oxygen levels are usually diagnosed by using a pulse oximeter. This test does not hurt and involves putting a probe on one of your fingers to read the oxygen level. Using oxygen will not make you 'dependent' on it.

2 How will I be given oxygen in the hospice?

All the wards in the hospice have piped oxygen at the bedside. Oxygen is given via plastic nasal prongs (nasal cannulae) or a mask. We can also supply you with a small portable oxygen cylinder if you want to move around the hospice or leave the building for a short period. The cylinder can be carried in a rucksack or pushed on a trolley.

3 Will I be able to have oxygen at home if I am discharged?

Not everyone needs oxygen at home. The medical team caring for you will discuss with you whether you might benefit from home oxygen.

If you go home with oxygen, we will ask your consent to give your details to the oxygen supplier and the local fire service, in case there is a fire in your home. The fire service may offer to check the safety of home oxygen and to offer advice about safety, including installation of free smoke alarms.

You may be referred to a lung specialist after six weeks to decide if you still need to continue the oxygen or if you can stop using it.

4 How do I have oxygen at home?

If you are likely to need oxygen for more than a few hours a day, the oxygen will usually be given through a machine called an oxygen concentrator, which will be installed in your home by an oxygen supplier. The concentrator is plugged into the mains electricity supply and comes with long tubing so that you can move around your home, while still benefiting from the oxygen.

You will be able to claim back the money spent on electricity to power the concentrator directly from the oxygen supplier, by completing the form that you will be given when the concentrator is installed.

The oxygen supplier will also provide a large static back up cylinder in case of power cuts. If you need a portable cylinder for going out, this can also be arranged.

5 How much oxygen will I need?

This can vary; some people use it for short periods, while others may need it 24 hours a day. Long term oxygen therapy is given for some types of chronic lung conditions and is usually started by a hospital.

6 Can I travel with oxygen?

Yes, provided you have discussed your overall fitness to travel with the team looking after you. This is particularly important if you are planning to fly. If you wish to travel please contact your oxygen supplier.

7 Can oxygen be harmful?

Oxygen is very safe when used properly. It is important **not** to adjust the flow rate of your oxygen concentrator or cylinder as this will have been prescribed for you after careful assessment. If you are concerned about breathlessness contact your St Christopher's nurse, GP or lung nurse as soon as possible.

For further information you can read the NHS website page on oxygen at www.nhs.uk/conditions/home-oxygen

Oxygen safety

Never adjust the flow rate of your oxygen – it has been assessed specifically for you and too much oxygen may be harmful. Please speak to your doctor or nurse if you are concerned about the flow rate.

Do not smoke (even e-cigarettes can be dangerous and are not permitted on hospice wards) or let anyone smoke near you or the oxygen because this creates a fire risk to you and other people. Even if the oxygen is turned off, the air in the room, your clothes and your bedding will have more oxygen in them because of the concentrator, and could catch fire more easily than usual. There are cases of people suffering severe burns to the face and lips when they smoked near their oxygen. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, it will not be possible for you to have oxygen at home if you smoke.

Keep away from naked flames and from heat – stay at least six feet back from naked flames and heat.

Avoid using flammable products like Vaseline,[®] or other petroleum-based products, alcohol gel, cleaning fluid and aerosols.

Keep tubing free and oxygen cylinders upright to avoid them getting damaged.

It is really important for your care that the information you give us is as full and accurate as possible.

StChristopher's

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