

# Guidelines for Using Oxygen



If you are living with an illness that causes difficulty breathing, your doctor may order supplemental oxygen. Increasing the amount of oxygen available to your body may improve your ability to move around, sleep, talk, eat and participate in the activities of your daily life more comfortably.

Learning about your equipment and how to use it properly will help it work more effectively and safely for you. Oxygen is safe when the equipment is used correctly. However, remember that oxygen aids in combustion and anything that sparks or flames will burn faster with oxygen present.

Here are some guidelines for you to follow when using oxygen:

- If your lips or nose becomes dry and chaffed, use non-petroleum based lip balm or lotion to avoid increased irritation. Use beeswax or other natural oil based products.
- Your hospice care team can provide padding or instruct you in the best way to “wear” tubing so it does not cause your ears or nose to be irritated and sore.
- For your safety, do not adjust the liter flow without talking to your doctor or hospice care team. Even though it seems logical, increasing the oxygen flow rate will not always help you breathe easier. In fact, it can sometimes make your condition worsen.
- Be careful not to put oxygen tubing under furniture, rugs or other items that could kink the tubing. Remind yourself and others to be aware of the placement of the oxygen tubing to prevent tripping and falls.
- Don’t smoke or allow others to smoke in the room with you. Keep yourself and your oxygen equipment at least 10 feet away from candles, barbeque grills, the fireplace or other open flames.
- Don’t use electrical equipment (hair dryer, razor) that could spark when using oxygen.

## How Oxygen is Provided

Your doctor will prescribe the amount of supplemental oxygen you are to receive and when you should use it. You may need to use it all the time or you may only use it at times when you are most likely to be out of breath. The amount of oxygen is prescribed in terms of liters per minute, for instance 2 liters/minute or 2 L/min.



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## Oxygen Concentrator

An oxygen concentrator is a machine that makes oxygen from the air and concentrates it for your use. It runs on electricity and can provide oxygen for you where you reside. The oxygen concentrator will not run out of oxygen.

Tips for using an oxygen concentrator:

- Make sure the concentrator is plugged in. It should be 12-24 inches from walls, furniture, curtains etc. to allow for adequate air circulation. The machine makes noise and emits some warmth, so keep this in mind when you choose its placement.
- Clean the filter on the back weekly.
- When you turn the machine on you will hear a short alarm that lets you know the oxygen is flowing properly. This alarm will shut off by itself.
- When the machine is turned on, check the flow rate to be sure it is set at the level prescribed by your doctor. You can do this by turning the dial until the metal ball rises to the correct level. Do not increase the flow without talking to your doctor or your hospice nurse.
- Place the nasal cannula in your nose. The cannula is a soft flexible tube with prongs that fit into your nostrils and should be changed every 2 weeks.
- If you feel the oxygen is not flowing correctly, check the tubing for kinks or disconnection. If there are no noticeable blockages, put the nasal cannula in a glass of water. If bubbles appear, oxygen is flowing.
- Turn the concentrator off when you are not using it.

## Oxygen Tanks

Oxygen tanks store oxygen in metal cylinders that are portable. They are used to supply oxygen when you do not have electricity or you are away from home. Oxygen tanks hold a defined amount of oxygen and will run out. Your medical equipment company will need to replace the used ones with new filled cylinders.

Here are some helpful tips for using portable oxygen:

- Open the tank with the E-wrench provided to you when the oxygen was delivered. Use the wrench to turn the valve counterclockwise. You should see the needle on the pressure gauge move. When the needle stops moving, check the amount of oxygen left in the tank.
- The needle on a full tank will go to 2000 psi on the dial. A new oxygen tank should be ordered when the tank is one-quarter full.
- Set the flow rate to the amount prescribed by your doctor.



- Place the oxygen tanks in an upright position on the floor of the car when traveling
- Turn the tank off when not in use by turning the flow rate to zero and turning the knob at the top clockwise.

Pease call your hospice care team if you have any questions or concerns about using oxygen.

