

Oxygen Therapy

Every cell in the body needs oxygen for energy. Oxygen is the fuel that helps our bodies work well. The lungs play a major role in giving the body the oxygen it needs.

The air we breathe has about 21% oxygen. For people with lung disease this may not be enough. The lungs of people with COPD may be unable to supply enough oxygen to the blood. Because of this they are often short of breath, restless and tired. More oxygen may help some people with COPD to breathe easier, do more activity and sleep better.

The arterial blood gas (ABG) is the test used by the doctor to see if your lungs are sending enough oxygen to your blood. The blood sample is usually taken from your wrist.

If your blood oxygen level is too low, your doctor will order extra oxygen for you to use at home.

Oxygen is a medicine and should be used just as your doctor orders. He will tell you when to use your oxygen and how high to set the liter flow.

Example: If the doctor says to use the oxygen at 2 liters per minute, then *always* set the flow at 2. Just because a little oxygen helps you *does not* mean that a lot of oxygen is even better.

Your doctor will decide what amount of oxygen is right for you. Use the oxygen only as ordered. Too much oxygen can be bad for you. Using more oxygen than you need may:

- cause you to feel tired
- cause you to be unable to think clearly
- cause your breathing to become shallow
- cause your lungs to be unable to get rid of carbon dioxide

Some people become depressed when they are told they will have to use oxygen at home. They think using oxygen means that they will never be any better or that they will die. Some people believe they will become addicted to or dependent on the oxygen. This is a myth.

Some people get enough oxygen from the air, and some people need an extra supply. You need to wear oxygen only when your lungs cannot supply enough. If you no longer need it, your doctor will tell you to stop it. As you get used to the idea of wearing oxygen, keep in mind how much better you will feel.

Safe Use of Oxygen At Home

You do not have to be afraid of using oxygen at home, but you must be respectful of it. Oxygen does not burn, but it makes other things burn faster. Here are some basic rules to follow while wearing oxygen:

1. Avoid open flames while wearing oxygen. No smoking by the person using the oxygen or by others while it is in use.
2. Avoid cooking on a gas stove while wearing oxygen. Your oxygen should be set up far enough from a gas stove or gas pilot light on a heater to be safe.
3. Do not use liquids which have an alcohol base such as rubbing alcohol.
4. Do not keep petroleum products or greasy rags near oxygen equipment. Remember that vaseline is also a petroleum product. It should not be used for irritation of the nose. Use a water base jelly such as K-Y Jelly or Lubafax.
5. Do not use aerosol products near the oxygen equipment. These products include things like hair spray, deodorant and air fresheners.