

Home Oxygen

Why is home oxygen prescribed?

Your doctor might prescribe oxygen if your lungs are not getting enough oxygen to your blood (a condition called hypoxemia). Breathing prescribed oxygen increases the amount of oxygen in the blood, usually reduces shortness of breath and other symptoms, and helps increase survival. Prescribed oxygen may also help protect your heart.

The air you breathe every day contains 21 percent oxygen. The oxygen you will receive at home is close to 100 percent pure oxygen. Because it is a pure concentration of oxygen, home oxygen is considered to be a drug and must be prescribed by your doctor. Oxygen is not addictive and causes no side effects when used as prescribed. Your doctor will prescribe a specific amount of oxygen that is right for you. Some people might need to use supplemental oxygen 24 hours a day, while others might only need oxygen during exercise or sleep.

Home oxygen can help promote your independence and make it easier and safer for you to complete daily living activities.

What are the methods used to deliver home oxygen?

Several types of systems are available to provide home oxygen, including compressed oxygen (tanks) and stationary oxygen concentrators. Oxygen is inhaled through a two-pronged lightweight tube called a nasal cannula, or on rare occasions, an oxygen mask.

Will my insurance cover home oxygen therapy expenses?

Not all insurance carriers are alike, and covered expenses vary among carriers. In most cases, however, oxygen therapy is covered when your physician provides the results of pulse oximetry testing that prove that supplemental oxygen is needed for your well-being. Pulse oximetry measures the amount of oxygen carried by the blood. This simple test helps your physician make a diagnosis and qualify you for oxygen therapy to be covered by most insurances, including Medicare.

What is a compressed oxygen system?

Compressed oxygen comes in a tank that stores oxygen as a gas. A flow meter and a regulator are attached to the tank to adjust the oxygen flow. The tanks vary in size, from very large stationary tanks to tanks that are small enough to carry around. The compressed oxygen system is generally prescribed when oxygen is not needed all the time, such as only when walking or performing physical activity.

What is an oxygen concentrator system?

The oxygen concentrator is an electric oxygen delivery system about the size of a large suitcase. The concentrator extracts some of the air from the room and separates the oxygen from other gases in the air. Oxygen is then delivered to you through a nasal

cannula. When in use, the concentrator should be placed in an open area. Never place it in a closet or other closed space.

What are oxygen conserving systems?

The most popular conserving devices are demand inspiratory flow systems. These devices deliver a burst of oxygen when you inhale and then turn off when you exhale. This intermittent flow of oxygen allows small cylinders to last three to six times longer as compared to conventional continuous flow devices.

Since these devices conserve oxygen, smaller, portable systems (tanks or liquid vessels) can provide hours of oxygen while you are away from home. Unfortunately, not everyone can tolerate these devices, so it is important to ask your doctor before using a conserving device.

Is home oxygen therapy safe?

Yes. Oxygen is a safe gas as long as it is used properly. Contrary to what most people believe, oxygen will not explode. Oxygen does, however, support combustion. Therefore, any material that is already burning will burn much faster and hotter in an oxygen-enriched atmosphere. It is very important to follow the safety precautions when you are using your oxygen.

How much does home oxygen therapy cost?

Using oxygen can be costly both for the oxygen supply itself and for the electricity needed to run the supply system. Please ask your home care supplier to discuss the expected costs with you before you choose a system.

Can I travel while I am on oxygen?

Yes! Oxygen therapy does not have to keep you at home. Ask Customer Service at STAT about services that can help while you are traveling.