Long-term oxygen therapy

This leaflet provides information for patients and their relatives about how best to use oxygen therapy at home. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is long-term oxygen therapy (LTOT)?
Long-term oxygen therapy is the use of oxygen therapy for at least 16 hours a day. It is usually delivered by a machine called an oxygen concentrator which runs off mains electricity supply. The concentrator takes air from the room and processes it into oxygen. This oxygen is then delivered to you either through small tubes placed at the nose, or sometimes through a mask. A long piece of plastic tubing that will also be supplied will enable you to use oxygen when moving around inside your home.

Why do I need LTOT?
Oxygen is a gas that is vital to all of the cells in our body. Some people may have low oxygen levels in their blood, for example because of a lung problem. Blood tests taken at the hospital have shown that the level of oxygen in your blood is low. Having low oxygen for long periods of time can place the heart and other major organs under stress. Using LTOT will increase the level of oxygen in your blood and help to protect your heart and other organs from this stress. Some people also feel less breathless and have more energy when using oxygen.

How much oxygen do I need?
The amount of oxygen that you need, which is sometimes called ‘flow rate’, is worked out for you after careful assessment by your specialist.

How many hours a day do I need to use oxygen?
LTOT usually needs to be used for at least 16 hours a day to ensure that you get the protective benefit. Usually this will mean wearing oxygen therapy overnight and then ‘topping up’ the hours during the day.

Your specialist will use the space below to write down your usual oxygen prescription.

Flow rate.................................................... Hours per day...............................................................
How long will I need LTOT?
It is common to experience low oxygen levels following a flare-up of your condition. In over half of patients, oxygen levels will return to normal within a few months and oxygen therapy can then be stopped. However, oxygen levels can stay low for some patients, meaning that therapy will need to be continued. You will be reviewed by a respiratory specialist six to eight weeks after starting oxygen therapy to check if you still need it.

Who will supply my home oxygen?
Home oxygen will be supplied to you by a medical gas company on behalf of the NHS. An engineer will install the equipment and explain to you and/or your relatives/carers how to use it.

Your specialist will use the space below to write down the name and number of your oxygen supplier.

Oxygen supplier.................................................. Contact number..........................................................

Can I still go away on holiday?
Yes. It is important to try to live life to the full. If you do wish to go away on holiday, you should contact the oxygen company and your oxygen nurse as early as possible. Oxygen is normally arranged via your usual supplier if you are planning to travel within the UK. For travel abroad, you will have to arrange oxygen yourself. Your oxygen supplier can advise you how to do this. If you are planning to fly, it may be necessary to discuss any requirements with your doctor.

Can oxygen be harmful?
When used properly, oxygen is very safe. It is important not to adjust the flow rate of your oxygen concentrator or cylinder as it has been prescribed for you after careful assessment. Increasing the flow rate may be particularly harmful. If you feel you are more short of breath than usual, do not turn the oxygen up but contact your GP as soon as possible.

Please use the equipment according to the manufacturer’s safety instructions to avoid harm. Oxygen is extremely flammable and will ignite in the presence of high temperatures or naked flames. This is very dangerous and can cause an explosion. It is therefore essential that no one smokes cigarettes or e-cigarettes near the oxygen equipment or tubing. Smoking must not be allowed in your home and oxygen should not be used near cookers, heaters or candles.

Will it cost me anything to use oxygen at home?
The concentrator runs off your electricity supply so your electricity bill may be slightly higher than usual. Your oxygen supplier should pay the extra charges of your electricity bill back to you quarterly. You should contact them directly on the number above if you have any questions.

What should I do if my oxygen concentrator stops working?
Contact your oxygen supply company on their 24-hour number. They will be able to arrange replacement equipment.

Appointments at King’s
We have teamed up with King’s College Hospital in a partnership known as King’s Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at King’s. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.
Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns about home oxygen therapy, please contact the integrated respiratory team, t: 020 7188 8636 or 07796 178719, 9am-4.30pm, seven days a week.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Useful sources of information
British Lung Foundation
Provides more information about your lung condition and oxygen treatment.
t: 03000 030 555 w: www.blf.org.uk

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.
t: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

Your comments and concerns
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.
t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.
t: 020 7188 8815 e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.
t: 111 w: 111.nhs.uk

NHS website
Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing.
w: www.nhs.uk

Was this leaflet useful?
We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets, or e: patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk