Why did my provider prescribe supplemental oxygen?

Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation™

AARC American Association for Respiratory Care

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People living with lung disease often have lower than normal levels of oxygen in their blood. When levels drop to 88% or lower, a healthcare provider may order supplemental oxygen. The benefits may include:

- Reducing breathlessness
- Increasing your ability to maintain an active lifestyle
- Helping to reduce stress on other organs

Oxygen is not addictive. Use it as prescribed by your healthcare provider.

What does my oxygen prescription include?

1. When to use your oxygen (during sleep, rest, activity, or at altitude)
2. How much oxygen you need for each activity (number setting or liter flow)
3. What type of oxygen equipment fits your lifestyle and oxygen requirements

There are many oxygen delivery systems available. What you receive is determined by your lifestyle, the level of oxygen your provider orders, and what's available through the oxygen company. Before you enter into a Medicare contract with an oxygen company, ask your healthcare provider to make sure the equipment offered by the supplier is correct for you.

I just received my oxygen equipment. What do I do now?

Make sure you received all the equipment your provider prescribed, which may include the following items.

OXYGEN CHECKLIST

☐ Stationary Oxygen Concentrators

Stationary concentrators concentrate oxygen from the air to a more pure form of oxygen. They are powered by electricity and typically not portable. Units are designed primarily for home or work.

☐ Portable Oxygen Concentrators (POCs)

POCs are smaller concentrators designed to be used for walking and activities outside the home. Units range from 3 lb. (worn over the shoulder) to 25 lb. (pulled on wheels). Generally, the smaller the unit, the lower the oxygen output (liter flow or pulse settings) and the shorter the battery life. POCs can be recharged via wall plug or car battery.

☐ Oxygen Tanks

These are green and silver (aluminum) tanks filled with oxygen. They can be very large or small enough to fit in a backpack. Some compressed tanks can be filled at home with a concentrator filling system, often referred to as a "Trans-Fill" unit. As with POCs, the smaller the tank, the more limited the amount and duration of oxygen.

☐ Liquid Oxygen

This is oxygen that has been supercooled, and turned to a liquid form. Liquid oxygen is stored in a canister that resembles a large thermos. As the oxygen warms, it turns back to gas that is available for use. A stationary liquid oxygen reservoir tank is used at home and can fill a smaller, portable tank for use outside. Weighing 3–11 lb., these tanks provide higher continuous flows than POCs. Not every oxygen company offers liquid oxygen.

☐ Cannula and Tubing

All stationary systems connect to tubing (25 or 50 ft) for use. Oxygen set above 6 liters per minute uses special "high-flow" tubing. The part that goes in your nose is called a cannula. Some who need high-flow rates use a small mask placed over the nose and mouth instead of a cannula.

☐ Oxygen Conserving Device (OCD)

This is a device that delivers oxygen by pulse or demand flow. It conserves oxygen by only delivering oxygen during a breath, and turning off until the next breath.

☐ Regulator and Flow Meters

Traditional oxygen regulators and flow meters deliver continuous-flow oxygen.

Make sure you get instructions for operating the equipment, including how to:

- ☐ Turn it on and off
- ☐ Make sure oxygen is flowing
- ☐ Attach flow meter and/or OCD and adjust flow rates
- ☐ Check whether oxygen is in the tank
- ☐ Know when the tank is empty
- ☐ Attach a humidifier (if needed)
- ☐ Understand your prescription, including how much oxygen (liters per minute or pulse setting) is ordered and what the settings are for rest, exertion, and sleep
- ☐ Properly wear a cannula
- ☐ Know the battery life of your POC and how to prolong it
- ☐ Maintain and care for your equipment
- ☐ Take safety precautions



Make sure you know whom to call for problems with equipment or deliveries.

Know your rights. If you have continuing problems with your equipment, service, or reimbursement, call **1-800-MEDICARE** (633-4227) and someone can put you in contact with a Competitive Acquisition

What is the difference between continuous flow and pulse or demand flow?

Continuous flow means that oxygen flows continuously into your nose through the nasal cannula.

With **pulse or demand flow**, a special regulator senses when you inhale and ONLY delivers a pulse of oxygen when you breathe in, allowing tanks and batteries to last longer.

Continuous flow and pulse settings are both prescribed as a number (1, 2, 3, etc.). A continuous flow setting of 2, 3, or 4 liters per minute is not the same as a pulse or demand flow setting of 2, 3, or 4.

How do I use oxygen safely?

- Avoid flames, sparks, cigarettes, matches, lighters, gas stoves, pilot lights, hair dryers (use the cool setting only), and frayed electric cords.
- Remember that oxygen is not flammable and does not explode on its own, but it will make a fire burn faster.
- Place a sign on your front door stating that oxygen is in use.
- Store tanks in an upright position. Do NOT use broken or cracked tanks. Do NOT store tanks in a closet, in direct sunlight, or next to heat sources.
- Do NOT use oily (petroleum-based) substances on your lips, nose, or face, including ChapStick, Vaseline, or Blistex. Check online for nasal lubricants designed for oxygen users.

Why is oxygen needed?

Every cell in your body needs oxygen to work. Oxygen moves from your lungs into your blood, which carries it to the rest of your body. Oxygen levels are measured using a fingertip device called a pulse oximeter, or by taking a blood sample.

How do I know I am getting enough oxygen?

Your healthcare provider may recommend a pulse oximeter to monitor your oxygen levels at home. Ask what your target oxygen level should be. If directed by your healthcare provider, you can adjust the flow of oxygen depending on what you're doing to keep your level in the recommended range.

- Some people need oxygen 24 hours a day. Others may not need oxygen while sitting, but require higher flows with activity.
- Some people need oxygen while sleeping.
- When traveling in an airplane or to a higher elevation, ask whether you will need oxygen or different settings.
- Airlines only allow oxygen with specific devices and require a prescription.
- Plan ahead to avoid running out of oxygen or battery life.

For more information, contact:

Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation™

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