

## OXYGEN THERAPY

22 January, 2016

The important thing to appreciate is that oxygen therapy is not a cure all treatment for breathlessness. Only some patients with breathlessness will benefit from oxygen treatment.

Many patients are breathless with normal oxygen levels and for some patients it is critical that they use oxygen even if they are not breathless.

### **Oxygen and Health**

If your oxygen is chronically below 90% saturation your body's tissues are put under undue stress and strain and particularly your heart and the blood vessels in your lungs. This can result in permanent damage and make you sicker over time. If you are in such a situation it is important to return your oxygen saturation to >90% for at least 15 hours of the day. Usually one to two litres per minute is sufficient but in some patients much more is needed.

If exercising then you may need higher flow rates to maintain your saturation however brief periods of low saturation are generally tolerable

### **Oxygen and Breathlessness**

If your lung disease is causing you to become breathless with activity and this is associated with a fall in oxygen then it is possible oxygen will be helpful. The best way to determine this is to undertake a 6 minute walk test both on room air and on oxygen to see if oxygen makes a difference or not.

### **Oxygen Devices**

Oxygen can be delivered from large cylinders, portable cylinders and home and portable oxygen concentrators. The best combination for you can be discussed with your doctor. Oxygen conservation devices can be used to allow portable oxygen to last longer with oxygen only flowing when you breathe in. You can use nasal tubing or a mask depending on personal preference but when high oxygen levels are required then a mask is usually the only option.

### **Rules for Oxygen prescribing and Service**

Oxygen is expensive and the State Government and Repatriation Services via Silver Chain control oxygen supply and support. In essence you will need to fit into one of the categories described above before oxygen can be delivered to you.

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### **Flying**

If you need oxygen as a regular therapy then you will almost certainly need more when you fly.

### **Smoking and Oxygen**

As well as it being counterproductive to be smoking and having oxygen there is a significant fire risk of smoking while taking oxygen and severe fires and facial burns have resulted. For this reason it is very unlikely you will receive oxygen if you are still smoking.

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