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Lung Cancer and the Use of Oxygen and Medications

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For some patients dealing with dyspnea (shortness of breath), the use of supplemental oxygen can be quite useful. Oxygen therapy benefits patients by increase the supply of oxygen to the lungs and thereby increasing the availability of oxygen to the body's tissues. Your physician can and should be the person to determine if oxygen supplementation couple be an option for you.

Many people believe that "being on oxygen" is a sign that they are desperately sick. This isn't always true. For some people, being on oxygen is an important part of their therapy. For others it may be a form of short term treatment. Only people who suffer from significantly low blood oxygen levels will benefit from oxygen therapy. In the case of lung cancer, patients with low blood oxygen levels (Hypoxemia) or temporary lung damage from infections (like pneumonia) will benefit most from oxygen therapy. Ask your Doctor to test your hemoglobin levels to determine if oxygen therapy might help you.

How Does Oxygen Therapy Work?

Oxygen Therapy is generally delivered as a gas from an oxygen source such as a cylinder or concentrator. The oxygen is either administered through small nasal "prongs" that fit into the nostrils or through a mask that covers the mouth and nose. Breathing in this extra oxygen raises low blood oxygen levels, making breathing easier and lessening strain on your body. Because your body can not store oxygen, the therapy works only when you are using it. Like any other prescription medicine, oxygen must be used very carefully and only as prescribed. Your doctor will tailor your oxygen prescription to your individual needs. When your oxygen is delivered to your home, you and your family will be given instructions on how it is to be used and on how to clean your equipment.

How Long Do People Use Oxygen?

If you have a respiratory infection you may only need oxygen until your infection clears and your blood - oxygen levels return to normal. If you have chronically low blood oxygen levels because of Cancer or COPD you may need oxygen permanently.

Funding for Oxygen Therapy

Oxygen therapy can be expensive, especially when taken over the long term. Government funding for oxygen therapy is available. Ask your doctor about funding programs and if you are eligible. Funding varies from province to province.

Tips for using Oxygen

Keep your Oxygen Equipment Clean. Clean equipment works more effectively. Clean equipment also helps prevent infections. Always wash your hands before cleaning or handling your oxygen equipment.

Travelling with Oxygen

With help and planning you can travel with Oxygen. Contact your Oxygen Supply Company well in advance to allow them to arrange for oxygen while travelling and at your destination.

Smoking, fire and flammable products¹

You should never smoke while using oxygen because of the risk of fire. Warn family members and visitors not to smoke near you when you are using your oxygen. Should you go out to a restaurant with your portable oxygen kit, ask to be seated in the nonsmoking section. Also, remember to stay at least five feet away candles, lit fireplaces and gas stoves; and do not use any flammable products (e.g., aerosol sprays) while using your oxygen.

Flow Adjustments

You should never change the flow of oxygen unless directed by your physician.

Remember that every question is a good one. Keep asking your doctor or oxygen supplier questions until you feel confident that you understand how and when to use your oxygen.

For more information:

Many Canadian provinces provide home oxygen for eligible residents. The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care Assistive Devices Program [provides a fact sheet about their Home Oxygen Program online](#). This is mostly about the terms and conditions of the benefit program, but also includes some tips about safe use of home oxygen.

The Vancouver Island Health Care Authority Home Oxygen Program has [an excellent explanatory website](#). Select "Patient handouts" from the left menu to print out a 2-page summary which includes tips on using oxygen and caring for equipment.

Sources:

1 Yourlunghealth.org. Healthy Living:Home Oxygen Therapy: http://www.yourlunghealth.org/healthy_living/living/home_oxygen_therapy/

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