

## Respiratory physiotherapy

# Ambulatory oxygen therapy

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Introduction

This leaflet has been designed to give you information about ambulatory oxygen therapy. We hope it answers some of the questions that you or those who care for you may have. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your medical team. It aims to help you understand more about what is discussed. If you have any questions about the information below, please contact us.

### Ambulatory oxygen therapy

Ambulatory oxygen is a therapy designed to help those whose oxygen level in their blood drops when they are active. Its aim is to maintain an adequate blood oxygen level. This in turn could:

- help keep you mobile
- allow you to do things that you might otherwise feel too breathless or tired to do

In some lung diseases the lungs do not keep up with the increased demands of the body during movement or exercise. This will result in your blood oxygen level decreasing. This may or may not be accompanied by breathlessness.

Day-to-day activities and going out and about may be more comfortable for you using this type of oxygen therapy.

The equipment used is usually either:

- a portable oxygen concentrator (POC). You carry this over your shoulder or in a trolley, or
- a cylinder that you carry in a backpack.

It can be used anytime you are active, inside or outside the house. But you must not use it for more than a few minutes while you are sat still, or when you are sleeping.

You must be assessed to determine if you are suitable to have ambulatory oxygen.

### Assessing you for ambulatory oxygen

If your doctor thinks you may be suitable for ambulatory oxygen therapy then we will arrange to see you for an assessment. You will need to attend Hammersmith Hospital, as that is where we carry out all our assessments.

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## Questions

We will ask you a range of questions about your home and social life. We will also check your level of mobility. This will help us understand where and how oxygen might help you.

## Six-minute walk test

We will then ask you to perform a six-minute walk test. You will need to walk along a flat corridor for six minutes at your own comfortable pace. At the same time, you will be wearing a probe on your finger to measure your blood oxygen level.

## Decision and discussion

We can use the results of this test along with the information you have given us to decide if you are suitable for ambulatory oxygen. If you are, then we will talk to you about the type of oxygen equipment that is best suited to you and your lifestyle.

## Repeat walk test

We'll then ask you to carry out another walk test while using the oxygen. This lets us work out:

- the suitability of the equipment
- how much oxygen you would need from it

## Safety

Oxygen is a flammable gas (it can ignite and explode). So, we must be very cautious with people who smoke or are exposed to smokers in their home or social environments. We will do a risk assessment to ensure your home environment is safe for oxygen.

## Starting ambulatory oxygen therapy

1. If your walk tests show that ambulatory oxygen may help you, we'll discuss with you what it involves and if you would like to trial it.
2. If you decide to start it, we'll send a prescription to your local oxygen supplier. They will bring you the equipment within a few days and show you how to use it.
3. We'll arrange to see you around six weeks later. Then we can check if it is helping and whether we need to make any changes to your oxygen flow rate.
4. If you want to continue using it, we'll monitor you on an annual basis. If you decide that this is not the therapy for you, we will ask for it to be removed

## Deciding to use ambulatory oxygen therapy

Some people decide that this is not a therapy they want to use. Others are keen to start it. It may be useful to discuss the possibility with family or those you live with. You can also bring someone to the appointment with you.

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Things to remember:

- it is important to understand that you do not have to use oxygen therapy
- to make it work, you must **want** to use it

Oxygen equipment can be very expensive for the NHS. So, if you decide you do not want it, please let us know. We can arrange for it to be removed from your home.

## Useful contacts

You will need to visit us at Hammersmith Hospital for your assessment.

For information about accessing our hospital sites, including public transport and parking information, please visit the Trust's website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

Lung function lab at Hammersmith Hospital: 020 3313 2352

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net) The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: [imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)