

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

Oxygen Therapy for Lung Disease

Dying for a Breath

When lung disease (COPD) progresses to the point that the lungs can't supply enough oxygen to meet the needs of the body, the doctor may prescribe home *oxygen therapy*. Symptoms that show oxygen may be needed—

- excessive sleepiness
- morning headaches and irritability
- poor concentration
- worsening shortness of breath
- swelling of the feet, ankles, and legs

Some people think that using oxygen will reduce their independence, or they will become addicted to it. However, oxygen therapy can greatly improve energy levels, the ability to breathe, and overall quality of life. Using this therapy can add years to a person's life. The doctor will use various tests to find out when, and how much, oxygen is needed.

Oxygen Containers

Oxygen comes in different kinds of containers and is given through soft prongs inserted into the nose, or through a tube inserted surgically directly into the throat.

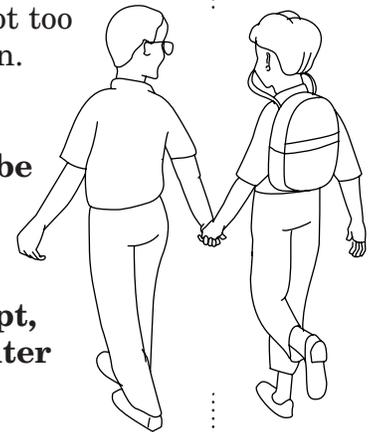
liquid oxygen—oxygen is stored as a very cold liquid in a container like a thermos, when released the liquid changes to a gas that is breathed like compressed gas; the liquid can be transferred to small portable containers; liquid oxygen is more expensive than compressed gas

concentrator—this electrically powered device separates the oxygen from the air, concentrates it, and then stores it; a tank of oxygen is needed in case of power failures

oxygen tanks—oxygen is stored under pressure in a tank with a regulator that controls the oxygen flow rate; the tanks can be large or portable

The doctor will prescribe a specific *flow rate* of oxygen, and you will need to make sure that not too much, or too little, is given.

Different flow rates may be given for sleeping and when active. **Care must be taken to avoid having anything flammable in the room where the oxygen container is kept, such as a cigarette lighter or gas range.**



Monitoring Tools

Doctors monitor lung function and levels with—

- **oximeter**—a clip that attaches to the finger and measures the amount of oxygen in the blood
- **spirometer**—a device that measures how well a person can exhale
- **peak flow meter**—measures how well air is moving out of the lungs

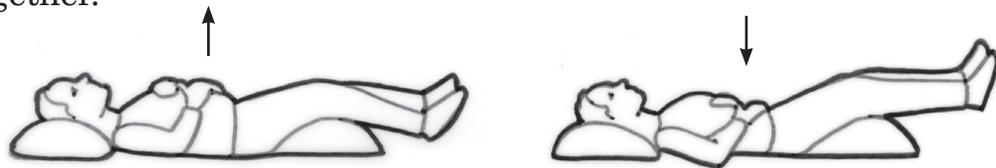
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Belly Breathing and Pursed-Lip Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing, also known as **belly breathing**, helps a person to relax and get more air out of the lungs. Have the person in your care practice this breathing technique by sitting in a comfortable chair or lying down. Have her put one hand on her abdomen and one hand on her chest. As she breathes in, have her notice how the abdominal muscles relax and then, as she exhales, tell her to tighten the abdominal muscles to help push air out. The chest should not move. The *exhalation* (breathing out) should always take longer than the *inhalation* (breathing in). It is very important that the person in your care do these exercises while calm and relaxed so she will be able to get into the habit of breathing this way.

Pursed-lip breathing helps to keep the breathing tubes open during exhalation and to improve the ability to slowly get more air out of the lungs. This type of breathing is used mainly for people with COPD (emphysema or bronchitis). To practice this technique, have the person in your care take a breath in through the nose and slowly let the breath out through pursed lips (as if she was whistling). Pursed-lip breathing and belly breathing are done together.



Flying with Oxygen

Make reservations as far in advance as possible prior to flying as medical clearance can take up to 30 days as you have to ask your doctor to fill out forms.

For a chart about airline requirements, visit:

http://www.breathineasy.com/tips_compare.html

Note that airlines are not required to provide oxygen service, and some, such as Southwest Airlines, do not.

Empty cylinders can be checked as baggage, in fact most airlines won't allow them in the cabin.

Traveling with oxygen, concentrators and vents is a very complex subject. Check with your airline for details and the latest rules.

Taking Care of Yourself—Stress Relief

Stress can make breathing more difficult, and when people have trouble breathing, they may become anxious. This can turn into panic and make breathing even more of a problem. Relaxation techniques are very helpful for people with chronic lung disease, and also for their caregivers. Here are some helpful tips to help the person in your care and you relax—

- develop a regular habit of yoga, prayer, meditation, or listening to soothing music
- use your imagination to pretend you are on the beach or some other peaceful place; stay there until you feel calm
- slowly tense and then relax each part of your body, starting with your toes and working your way up. Remember to breathe while you do this exercise.



Inspiration

Conceal a flaw, and the world will imagine the worst.

Live Life Laughing!

When I talk to my wife, I always keep my words soft and sweet, just in case I have to eat them.



Conserve Energy

People with COPD must conserve their energy so they won't become exhausted.

Encourage the person to—

- take it easy; move slowly
- sit while doing chores
- avoid lifting and bending; keep household items within easy reach
- rest after eating
- use a cart with wheels to carry things
- use helping devices such as a long-handled reacher or long-handled tongs
- use a bath bench and hand-held shower head in the bathtub

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Avoiding Air Pollution, Irritants, Allergens & Smoking

People with COPD may be affected by irritating substances in the air, or they may have allergies to airborne allergens (substances that are carried on the air that cause allergic reactions like sneezing or watery eyes) such as pollen. Any kind of air pollution inside or outside of the home should be avoided, including dust, smoke, fumes from wood or coal-burning stoves, and strong odors in general. Some people are highly allergic to mold and may have trouble breathing if they are exposed to it.

The most important thing a person with lung disease can do is **STOP SMOKING**. Smoking is the number one cause of COPD and can make any kind of lung disease worse. Medications are available that can help a person stop smoking (such as the “patch”). Sometimes even multiple medications may be needed. Eating a healthy diet, drinking plenty of water and juice, and taking vitamin supplements can make withdrawal easier and less uncomfortable.

People who smoke and have lung disease need extra support and encouragement from family members, friends, and caregivers so they can stop smoking. Professional counselors can also help. Activities should be planned that reduce depression and stress, which can make a person want to “light up.”

NEXT ISSUE...CANCER CARE

Caregiver Assistance News

“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

Q U I C K Q U I Z

The main goals of oxygen therapy rehabilitation for people with lung disease are to increase the ability to breathe, become more independent, improve the quality and length of life; reduce the need for medication, doctor visits and hospitalizations; lower anxiety and learn how to manage symptoms, and improve the ability to exercise. Read the issue and answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Oxygen comes in different kinds of containers and is given through prongs inserted into the nose, or through a tube inserted surgically directly into the throat.
T F
2. Some of the signs that the lungs can't supply enough oxygen to meet the needs of the body are morning headaches and worsening shortness of breath.
T F
3. Using oxygen therapy will reduce independence and people will become addicted to it.
T F
4. The doctor will use various tests to find out when, and how much oxygen is needed and will prescribe a specific *flow rate* of oxygen.
T F
5. Care must be taken to avoid having anything flammable in the room where the oxygen container is kept, such as a cigarette lighter or gas range.
T F
6. Diaphragmatic breathing, also known as belly breathing, helps a person to relax and get more air out of the lungs.
T F
7. The most important thing a person with lung disease can do is STOP SMOKING. Smoking is the number one cause of COPD and can make any kind of lung disease worse.
T F
8. People with COPD are not affected by irritating substances in the air.
T F
9. Pursed-lip breathing helps to keep the breathing tubes open during exhalation and to improve the ability to get more air out of the lungs.
T F
10. Relaxation techniques are very helpful for people with chronic lung disease.
T F

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____