

FAQs



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What is oxygen?

Oxygen is a colorless, tasteless, odorless gas that is necessary for life. Each day we breathe about 20,000 times ([Sachdev, 2022](#)), and the air we breathe is made up of approximately 21% oxygen and several other gases ([10 Interesting Things About Air – Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet 2022](#)). Oxygen is important for keeping us alive because our bodies need it for energy and growth. Without oxygen, the body's cells would die.

How is oxygen made and stored for home use?

There are several different methods, but the most common are:

Stationary Oxygen Concentrator: This unit pulls in ambient air and filters out the nitrogen, leaving pure oxygen. They require very little maintenance and can generate continuous oxygen without needing refills.

Portable Oxygen Cylinder: The oxygen gas is compressed and stored in aluminum or steel pressurized tanks. This system is typically used in conjunction with a stationary oxygen concentrator and requires frequent delivery refills based on your activity.

Portable Oxygen Concentrator: Like the stationary oxygen concentrator, **only portable**. This unit filters ambient air to create concentrated oxygen; however, unlike portable oxygen cylinders, it does not require refills.

- Patients requiring continuous oxygen will normally be set up with a stationary concentrator for use in the home and a portable system, such as the portable cylinders for when they need to be mobile.

What is the difference between a nasal cannula and a face mask?

A nasal cannula is a small, adjustable plastic tube placed under the nose and is the most commonly used oxygen intake method. This tubing is attached to the oxygen tank or oxygen concentrator and delivers oxygen flow to your nose. A face mask can be prescribed if you find cannulas uncomfortable. Face masks are better suited to a stationary situation such as when you are sitting or in bed.

How do I order home oxygen once my provider prescribes it?

Your provider, respiratory therapist, social worker or nurse may recommend an oxygen supplier to you. In most cases, your healthcare team will send your oxygen prescription directly to Preferred Homecare.

How much does home oxygen cost? Will Medicare and/or my insurance pay for it?

The cost can vary greatly depending on your insurance and prescription. We will help you select the most economical system to meet your needs and activities and estimate your approximate monthly cost. In most cases, Medicare will pay 80% of approved expenses (after your deductible is met) and many private insurance plans also pay for oxygen. Our trained Insurance Specialists will work with your insurance carrier to verify your benefits and maximize your coverage.

Why do I need supplemental oxygen?

Normally, oxygen passes readily from the lungs into the bloodstream and is pumped by the heart to all parts of the body. When lung disease occurs, oxygen may not be able to pass as readily into the bloodstream. When the heart is diseased, it may not be able to pump as much oxygen-carrying blood.

Either of these situations can result in diminished amounts of oxygen reaching the organs and tissues of the body, preventing them from functioning properly. This can cause many undesirable effects such as [difficulty breathing, fatigue, confusion, loss of memory, etc. \(Pruthi et al., 2018\)](#). Breathing supplemental oxygen increases the amount of oxygen that passes into the bloodstream and is carried to the organs and tissues.

How can I tell if I need supplemental oxygen?

Believe it or not, in many cases you really cannot tell when you need or don't need supplemental oxygen. However; you might suspect you need supplemental oxygen if you have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Decreased ability to exercise
- Difficulty breathing
- You easily get fatigued
- You experience periods of disorientation or memory loss

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Conversely, there are patients with significant lung diseases that may not feel any of the above symptoms, but may require supplemental oxygen. The only true way to determine if you need supplemental oxygen is to see your provider. Your provider will measure the amount of oxygen in your blood and evaluate your medical condition to determine the need for supplemental oxygen.

Can I become addicted to oxygen?

We need oxygen to live, so in essence, we are already addicted to oxygen. However, using supplemental oxygen is not “addictive.” If your condition improves, you may no longer require supplemental oxygen.

I am on supplemental oxygen and I am still short of breath, why?

There are many reasons for shortness of breath or the sensation of difficult breathing. Oxygen can help, but in some cases breathing can still seem hard. Never adjust your liter flow without consulting with your provider first.

How often do I need to use my oxygen?

Your provider will determine how many hours per day you should use the oxygen. If you are prescribed oxygen just at night, an oxygen concentrator system is the preferred method of delivery. If your provider also wants you to use oxygen during the day, an oxygen concentrator and a portable system is usually provided. It is important to always follow your provider’s directions carefully.

Can I use electrical appliances and cook while using oxygen?

Oxygen is flammable, but as long as a few simple precautions are taken, you can continue normal activities. For example, don’t cook on an open flame, don’t smoke, and watch that your oxygen tubing does not come in contact with hot items that could cause the plastic to melt. Also, appliances that get hot or spark during operation should be kept at least five feet away from your oxygen system.

Can I smoke while on oxygen?

No, you should never smoke while on oxygen.

What if someone around me is smoking, can I use my oxygen?

Try to avoid this situation, however, if that is not possible, ensure they are at least twenty-five (25) feet away from you and your oxygen equipment.

Can I use oxygen outside of my home?

Yes, if your provider has prescribed oxygen for more than nighttime use, you will be provided with a portable oxygen system that you can take with you.

Can I drive a car or travel while using oxygen?

Yes. When driving, secure the oxygen unit so it will not tip or fall and leave a window slightly open for ventilation. You can also travel on public transportation while using oxygen.

How heavy are the portable systems?

Portable tanks vary in weight from 4 to 15 pounds. These tanks may be carried in a shoulder bag or placed on an available pull cart. Alternatively, you may be provided with a portable oxygen concentrator dependent on your oxygen needs. Portable oxygen concentrators weigh approximately 8 to 10 pounds.

What is an oxygen conserving device (OCD)?

An OCD is a device that controls the flow of oxygen from your tank or concentrator based on the rate in which you inhale.

How does the oxygen conserving device work?

An OCD releases oxygen only when you inhale, which dramatically increases the amount of time you can use the oxygen supply. Many people also find that an oxygen conserving device is more comfortable than a continuous flow. The short “pulse” of oxygen delivered during inhalation is almost undetectable and the humidity in the room air helps maintain a normal level of moisture in your nasal cavity.

I am using an oxygen conserving device and the pulse seems so short. Am I really getting enough oxygen?

Yes, the OCD delivers a precise burst of oxygen at a relatively high flow rate. This assures that the oxygen delivered flows deep into your lungs for maximum therapeutic benefit. **If you still have concerns, check with your prescriber.**

Can I refill oxygen tanks myself at home?

In some case, if you qualify, there are certain types of oxygen systems that allow the refill of oxygen tanks or cylinders from the comfort of your home. You can contact Preferred Homecare to ask if a home fill system is right for you.

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What do I do if I run out of oxygen?

Call us to replace or refill your supplemental oxygen supply. When you are not using your supplemental oxygen, you may feel some of the same discomfort you experienced before going on oxygen therapy, but this discomfort should not be life-threatening. If you are away from home and your portable tank runs out, return home for your refill and continue using your available oxygen. As much as possible, you will want to monitor your supply of tanks and call us in advance of running short. In case of an emergency, please dial 911.

How do I care for my tubing?

Minimal care is required of your oxygen tubing and nasal cannula or oxygen mask. We recommend that, once or twice a day, you remove the cannula or mask and wipe it clean with a damp cloth. Also, you should replace your nasal cannula or mask every two to four weeks and replace your tubing every 3 months. Do not use alcohol or oil-based products on or near your cannula or mask.

Is using oxygen dangerous?

In an oxygen-rich environment things burn more easily and rapidly. Since your supplemental oxygen system creates an oxygen-rich environment do not use it near an open flame, burning cigarette or electrical equipment

that sparks during operation. In addition, do not use oil, grease, Vaseline® or any other petroleum-based products on your oxygen equipment. Our Customer Service Technicians will also thoroughly explain all safety precautions related to your home oxygen therapy.

I am experiencing some physical/medical issues while on oxygen, what should I do?

If you experience any of the following problems, call your provider:

- Increased shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Fever or chills
- Increased wheezing
- Increased mucus production
- Mucus becomes thicker
- Change in mucus color
- Headaches
- Loss of appetite
- Increased cough
- Swelling in your ankles or around your eyes
- Weight gain overnight
- Feeling dizzy or sleepy
- Any change in physical sensation after taking a new medication

If you experience severe physical problems, call 911.

MEDICAL SUPPLIES FAQ

How often can I re-order my supplies?

Once every 30 days.

How often do I need a new Rx?

Make sure your provider indicates refills on a prescription. With adequate refills, most prescriptions can last up to a year. Medical records could be required every 6-12 months for continued coverage. Wound care supply orders can be valid up to 3 months with adequate refills.

Can I pick up my supplies?

Supplies are stocked in our offsite warehouses and are not available for pick up at our branches.

When will I receive my supplies?

Supplies are shipped directly to your home from our closest warehouse. Packages can arrive as soon as 2-3 business days after your order is received and verified. Insurance qualification/authorization guidelines must be met prior to shipment, which could cause a delay in our order.

How do I reorder my supplies?

You can call to place your reorder at your local center. Ask your representative if you qualify for automatic shipments.

Can a nurse from a Home Health Agency privately purchase supplies for their patient?

As long as the Home Health Agency has signed the Letter of Agreement and is willing to pay the sale price of each item as listed in the agreement.

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MEDICAL EQUIPMENT FAQ

What types of hospital beds are available?

We offer several varieties of hospital beds. The most common is the semi-electric bed; however, we also offer a full-electric bed and a fixed-height bed. In addition, we offer beds to accommodate almost any weight.

What type of wheelchairs do you offer?

We offer several different types of wheelchairs to accommodate a wide range of heights and weights. The most common is a standard wheelchair. There are also options to accommodate specific patient needs such as reclining, heavy duty, and pediatric.

Are there accessories for wheelchairs available?

Yes, common accessories include rear anti-tippers, oxygen cylinder holders, elevated leg rests (ELR), and seat belts. Most accessories are compatible with our wheelchairs; however, to confirm whether or not a particular accessory is compatible with your wheelchair model, please contact your local Preferred Homecare Branch.

What kind of walking aids does Preferred Homecare carry?

We carry canes, crutches and several types of walkers all designed to help you or your loved one stay mobile. Your provider will prescribe the type of walk aid he/she feels will best fit your medical need.

What is the difference between a walker and a rollator?

A rollator is a walker with wheels. The most common rollators have 4 wheels and a brake system; however, some come with three wheels. A walker has no wheels. Both walkers and rollators come in a variety of sizes to fit most patients' height and weight.

HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS FAQS

What kind of patient care does Preferred Homecare offer?

Preferred Homecare is your partner in providing compassionate and clinically sound care for your patient. We take seriously the commitment to service your patient with the best in clinical expertise, effective and appropriate treatment regimes, and timely and courteous customer service.

Your patient will benefit from the vast expertise of our healthcare team, who work with you, the Healthcare Professional, to deliver your patient outstanding support. Not only will your patient receive excellent care, they will learn how to manage their health through the education and resources we provide. We also work closely with your patient's insurance company to handle reimbursement—quickly and conveniently—so you don't have to.

How do I submit an order?

The most efficient way to submit an order is via fax to your local branch.

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