

Patient Education: Oxygen Safety at Home

What is Oxygen?

Oxygen is a gas that we all need to live. Sometimes after being sick or leaving the hospital, your doctor may order oxygen for you to use at home. Oxygen helps you breathe easier and keeps your body healthy.

Oxygen is not explosive by itself, but it makes fire burn faster and hotter. This means you must be very careful when using oxygen at home.

Types of Oxygen Equipment

1. Oxygen Concentrator

- A concentrator is a machine that pulls oxygen from the air and gives it to you through tubing.
- It makes a soft humming sound and produces warm air.
- It needs good airflow, so don't put it against the wall or in a tight space.

2. Oxygen Canister (Tank)

- A canister is a strong metal container filled with pure oxygen.
- It is portable, so you can take it with you outside the home.
- It must be stored and handled carefully.
- Always have FULL canisters in case of power outage

Safe Use of a Concentrator

- Place the machine in an open, well-ventilated space.

- Keep at least 1–2 feet of space around the concentrator.
- Do not block the airflow, and keep it away from heaters, stoves, or candles.
- If the machine overheats or breaks, you may not get enough oxygen.

Safe Storage and Handling of Canisters

- Store canisters flat on their side or upright in a holder so they do not roll or fall.
- Do not keep them behind doors or in places where they could be knocked over.
- If a canister is damaged, it can shoot like a rocket and hurt someone.

Important Oxygen Safety Rules

Fire Safety

- Never smoke, light candles, or use an open flame while oxygen is in use.
- Stay away from gas stoves while using oxygen. Ask your doctor if you may remove it briefly to cook.
- Adding extra tubing does not make oxygen use safer near fire. The tubing itself can carry oxygen and burn quickly.

Skin and Product Safety

- Do not use petroleum jelly, vapor rub, or oily lotions near your nose, mouth, or tubing. They can cause fire when exposed to oxygen.
- Use water-based products instead.

Follow Your Doctor's Orders

- Never turn your oxygen up or down without your doctor's directions.

- Too much oxygen can cause problems like headaches, confusion, or high carbon dioxide in your blood.

Home Safety

- Make sure your home has working smoke detectors. Check the batteries often.
- Put up “No Smoking, Oxygen in Use” signs on doors and windows.
- Keep tubing short to prevent tripping, and check often for tangles or kinks that can block oxygen flow.
- Have a fire extinguisher nearby and know how to use it.

Back-up Plan

- Ask your oxygen supplier for a back-up canister in case the power goes out and your concentrator stops working.
- Always keep your supplier’s phone number nearby.

Summary

Using oxygen safely can help you stay healthy, prevent accidents, and avoid going back to the hospital. Always follow your doctor’s instructions, check your equipment often, and remember—oxygen keeps you breathing, but safety keeps you living!

Patient Homework / Assessment

Answer True or False for each statement:

1. True/False: Oxygen makes fire burn faster, so smoking around it is dangerous.
2. True/False: It is safe to store oxygen canisters behind a door if the space is small.

3. True/False: You should keep at least 1–2 feet of space around an oxygen concentrator.
4. True/False: Petroleum jelly is safe to use on your lips and nose while on oxygen.
5. True/False: Oxygen canisters should be laid flat or kept in a holder to stay upright.
6. True/False: You should check your tubing often for tangles and kinks.
7. True/False: You can turn up your oxygen if you feel short of breath, even without asking your doctor.
8. True/False: Smoke detectors are important in a home where oxygen is used.
9. True/False: It is okay to light candles as long as the oxygen machine is in another room.
10. True/False: An oxygen concentrator works best in a well-ventilated space.
11. True/False: If an oxygen canister falls and gets damaged, it can become dangerous.
12. True/False: You should place “No Smoking, Oxygen in Use” signs in your home.
13. True/False: Tubing that is too long can cause tripping.
14. True/False: Adding extra tubing makes it safer to smoke while on oxygen.
15. True/False: Too much oxygen can be harmful to your body.
16. True/False: You should keep oxygen away from heaters, stoves, and open flames.
17. True/False: A back-up oxygen tank is not needed in case of a power outage.
18. True/False: Oxygen concentrators pull oxygen from the air and give it to you.
19. True/False: You should call your oxygen supplier if your equipment stops working.
20. True/False: Following your doctor’s prescription for oxygen is very important.

Answer Key with Explanations

1. **True** – Oxygen makes fire burn faster and is very dangerous with smoking.
2. **False** – Never store canisters behind doors; they can fall or be knocked over.
3. **True** – Always allow 1–2 feet of space for airflow.
4. **False** – Petroleum-based products can catch fire around oxygen.
5. **True** – Canisters should be flat or in a secure holder to prevent falling.
6. **True** – Tangles or kinks can block oxygen flow.
7. **False** – Never change your oxygen flow without doctor’s approval.
8. **True** – Smoke detectors are lifesaving with oxygen in the home.
9. **False** – Candles are never safe around oxygen, even in another room.
10. **True** – Concentrators need ventilation to work properly.
11. **True** – A damaged canister can act like a projectile.
12. **True** – Warning signs alert visitors and emergency workers to oxygen use.
13. **True** – Long tubing increases the chance of tripping.
14. **False** – Extra tubing does not make oxygen safer around flames.
15. **True** – Too much oxygen can cause health problems like hypercapnia.
16. **True** – Keep oxygen away from heat sources and open flames.
17. **False** – Always have a back-up tank in case of power failure.
18. **True** – Concentrators make oxygen from the air around you.
19. **True** – Call your supplier if your machine or tanks do not work.
20. **True** – Always follow your doctor’s prescription for safe oxygen use.