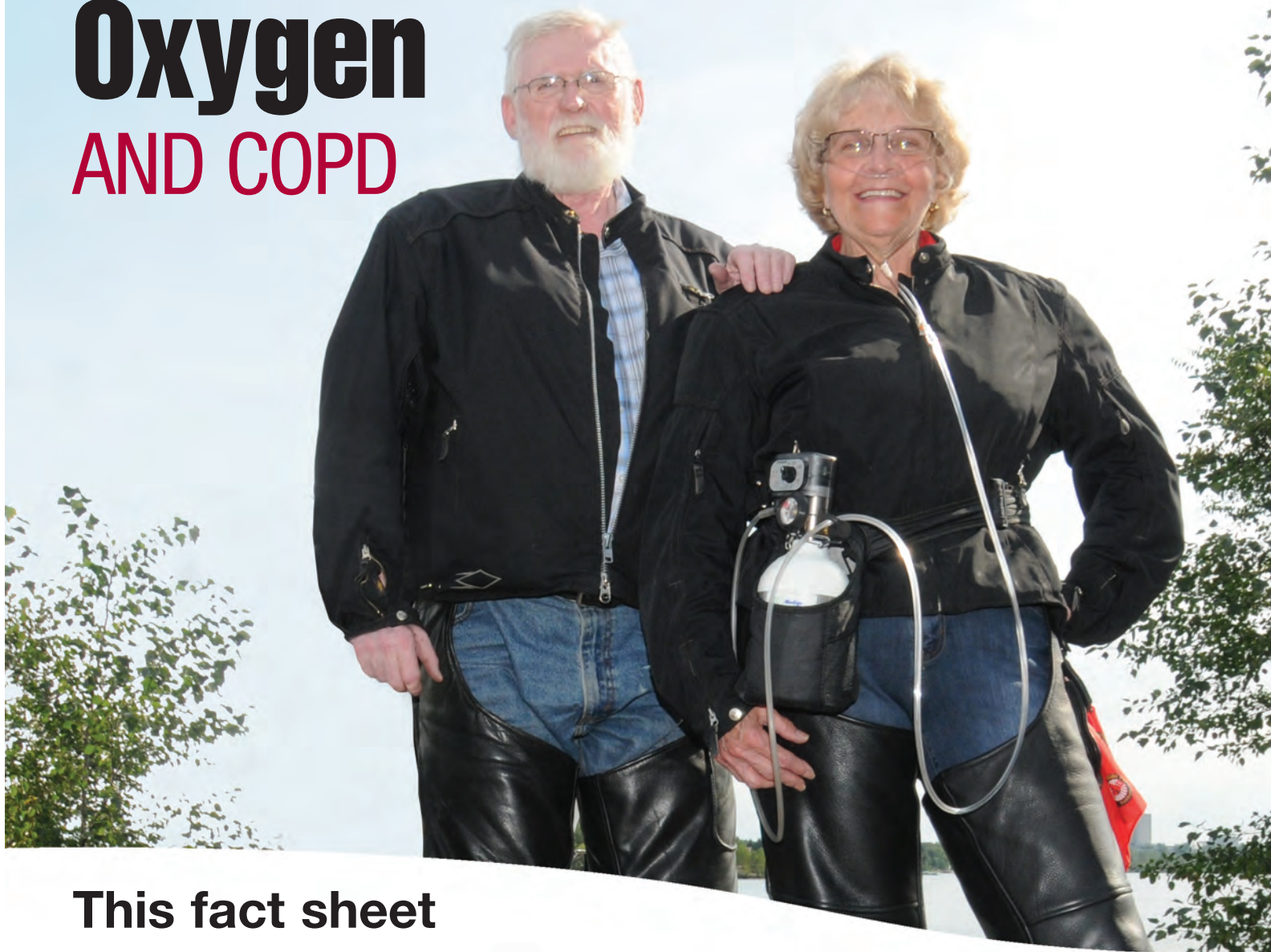


# Oxygen AND COPD



**This fact sheet  
talks about home  
oxygen, prescribed as  
a medicine for some  
people with COPD.**

For more information on COPD,  
phone **1-866-717-COPD (2673)**  
or visit us online at **[www.lung.ca/copd](http://www.lung.ca/copd)**

### How oxygen can help you

Home oxygen is not a cure for COPD. It's not right for everyone and is only needed for a small number of people with COPD. But for the COPD patients who need it, oxygen is a very good treatment. Home oxygen is used the same way as your medication – it is prescribed by your doctor if the level of oxygen in your blood is low. If used properly, oxygen helps you:

- live longer
- have less shortness of breath
- exercise more easily, which keeps you fit

### Does everyone with COPD need supplemental oxygen?

No. Only people who regularly have a low level of oxygen in their blood need supplemental oxygen. A low oxygen level is called hypoxemia.

### How will I know if I need oxygen?

A test will be done to measure saturation levels, the amount of oxygen in your blood.

If you have low oxygen levels your doctor may prescribe oxygen. If you do not have low oxygen levels, your doctor will not prescribe oxygen because it will not help you.

### How many hours a day do people use home oxygen?

Some people use oxygen all day and night, continuously. People who need to use continuous oxygen should use it for at least 15 hours or more a day.

Some people only need oxygen at night, while they sleep (nocturnal oxygen).

Some people only need oxygen while they exercise or do any physical activity (exertional oxygen).

### If I am on continuous oxygen, do I always need the same dose (flow rate)?

No. You may need a higher dose of oxygen (a higher flow rate) when you're exercising or sleeping. That's because your natural oxygen level may drop during exercise or sleep. You may need a higher oxygen flow rate when you are eating, getting dressed, doing household chores as these activities makes you spend more energy.

**Is it okay to take more or less oxygen than my doctor prescribed?**

No. Follow the prescription exactly. Your doctor or health care provider will talk with you about if and when you should change the flow rate. Extra oxygen could be harmful.

If you do not feel well on the amount of oxygen you are currently using, please see your doctor for a checkup.

**Does being on oxygen mean I'm about to die?**

No. Many people are on oxygen for years. It helps them live longer.

**What happens if I don't use oxygen for as long as I'm supposed to?**

Your body can't store oxygen. When you don't use oxygen, you miss out on the benefits it gives you.

**If I start using oxygen, will I need it forever?**

No, not necessarily. Some people take oxygen long term. But other people only need it for a few weeks as they recover from a COPD flare-up. Flare-ups are times when your symptoms get really bad, for example if you get pneumonia, or a common cold. If oxygen is prescribed by your doctor when you are otherwise well you may need to use it forever.

**Will using oxygen stop me from feeling short of breath (hungry for air)?**

No, unfortunately. Oxygen can't take away the feeling of being short of breath. To feel less short of breath, try to:

- Use special breathing techniques
- Take your rescue medicine that contains a bronchodilator medicine (for example, Ventolin, Bricanyl, or Oxeze)
- Talk to your doctor about walking aids

To get fact sheets on breathing techniques, exercise and medicines, go to [www.lung.ca/copd](http://www.lung.ca/copd) or call our COPD help line at 1-866-717-2673. We'll mail you the fact sheets free of charge.

**If I use supplemental oxygen, will I still need to take other COPD treatments?**

Yes. People who use oxygen must still take their other treatments. Other COPD treatments include:

- COPD medicines (inhalers)
- Pulmonary rehabilitation, special classes that teach people with lung disease how to exercise and manage their symptoms

**My doctor gave me an oxygen prescription, now what?**

Once you have an oxygen prescription, you need to contact an oxygen supplier. The home oxygen supplier will show you how to use the equipment, and review the safe use of oxygen. They can also help explain possible funding options in your province.

### Different ways of getting oxygen at home

Oxygen comes in different kinds of systems. Your respiratory therapist and oxygen company can help you choose the one that is right for your routine and your budget.

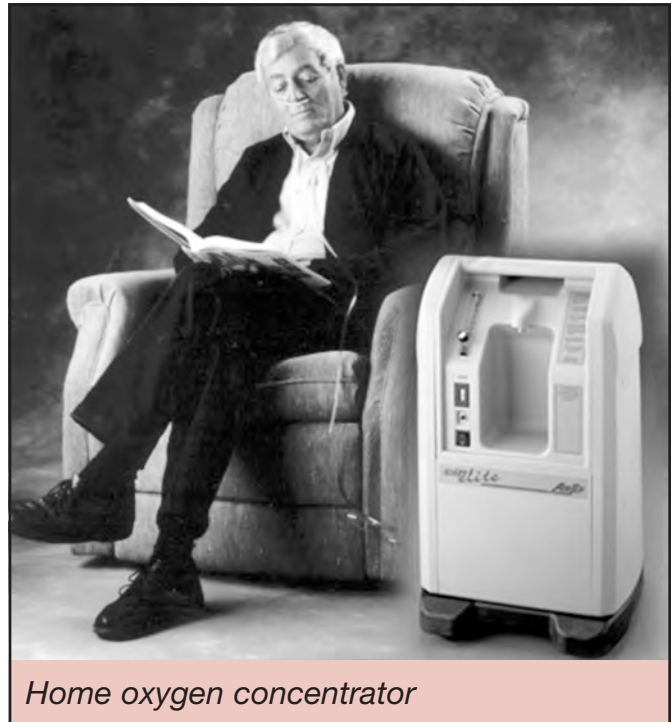
With all the systems, you will need a tube delivering oxygen into your nose, called “nasal prongs”.



*Nasal prongs*

### Home oxygen concentrator

An oxygen concentrator is a special machine that “makes” oxygen. It takes oxygen from the air and concentrates it (makes it stronger).



*Home oxygen concentrator*

If you have a home oxygen concentrator, you need a backup oxygen supply (for example, a compressed oxygen tank). If the electricity cuts out, the oxygen concentrator won't work.

- You need to plug it into the wall (it requires electricity at all times).
- You will still need portable tanks to use when you leave home.
- You need to keep the concentrator in an open space.



*Trans fill concentrator*

### Trans fill concentrator

A trans fill concentrator is an oxygen concentrator that can fill up smaller portable oxygen tanks. You can leave the house for a few hours with your portable tank. When your portable tanks are empty, you just refill them.

- You need training to use a trans fill concentrator. It's a bit tricky.
- Trans fill concentrators are useful for people who are active and/or who live in the country, where it is hard to get oxygen deliveries.

### Portable oxygen concentrators (also called portable concentrators or POCs)

These are similar to home oxygen concentrators, but they're smaller and easy to carry.

Portable oxygen concentrators:

- are lightweight (about 5 to 10 pounds/2 to 4 kg)
- operate on batteries
- can plug into a car lighter electrical outlet
- are available to rent, for example for trips
- are expensive to own
- need extra testing make sure you are getting enough oxygen

### Liquid oxygen

Liquid oxygen is oxygen in liquid state. It is then poured into tanks.

- You need regular delivery.
- The home bulk system can hold a lot of oxygen.
- Liquid cylinders are portable and lightweight.
- You can refill the cylinders at home from the bulk system, then go out.
- The oxygen is not at high pressure.
- You need to follow safety instructions when filling the portable unit.



*Liquid Oxygen: Home System*

## Factsheet: Oxygen

### Oxygen conserving device

Most oxygen devices supply oxygen continuously, with no breaks. But people don't need the oxygen all the time, only when they are breathing in. The oxygen conserving device is a special attachment that gives a big burst of oxygen while you're breathing in. By delivering oxygen only when you breathe in, the device helps your oxygen supply last 2 or 3 times longer.

These devices are not for everyone, talk to your health care providers to see if this is right for you.



*Oxygen conserving device*

### Compressed oxygen cylinders

Oxygen is squeezed into a tank at high pressure. The company delivers tanks to your home.



*Compressed oxygen cylinder home delivery*

- The oxygen tanks are not very portable
- The oxygen tanks are heavy and bulky – you can't easily walk around with them.
- You need somewhere to store them.
- You need fresh tanks delivered often.

### Things you should know about oxygen therapy

#### 1. Ask how to use the equipment

If you do go on long-term oxygen therapy, you will deal regularly with people at your home oxygen supply company. Learning how to use and care for the oxygen equipment may seem complicated. Have the oxygen company give you a demonstration. If you're not clear on something, keep asking until you feel confident. For additional support, have a family member or caregiver learn about your equipment as well.

Make sure you talk to your home oxygen provider about oxygen safety information.

#### 2. Keep your equipment clean

Clean equipment works better. Keeping your equipment clean also helps to prevent infections. The oxygen supply company will teach you about when to replace your oxygen-source tubing and nasal prongs. Always wash your hands before cleaning or handling your oxygen equipment.

#### 3. Ask about funding

Oxygen therapy can be expensive, especially over the long term. If you meet certain criteria, you may qualify for government funding for oxygen therapy – ask your doctor or oxygen supply company if you're eligible. Funding, varies from province to province, and may only cover some of your home oxygen needs.

#### 4. If you smoke, try to quit

You must not smoke if you're using oxygen. In fact, no one can smoke within 10 feet or 3 meters of oxygen equipment. Most people find it hard to quit smoking. Counseling, medications, and other supports can help you quit. Our helpline 1-866-717-2673 can help you find the best support to help you quit.

#### 5. Plan before you travel

Travelling with oxygen is very possible; you just need to plan ahead. Before you decide to travel, contact your doctor and your home oxygen supplier. Your doctor can help you decide if you are able to take the type of trip you have planned. The home oxygen supplier will help coordinate the equipment you need while you are travelling. They will also arrange for equipment when you arrive at your destination. For more information on travelling with COPD visit [www.lung.ca/copd](http://www.lung.ca/copd) or call 1-866-717-COPD.

**Get complete treatment for your COPD**

Home oxygen is an important way to treat COPD, but there are other treatments too. To get the most out of life and to improve your symptoms, you also need to:

**Take your medications:** Taking your medications as prescribed is essential to help to manage COPD, and potentially slow the disease from getting worse.

**Quit smoking** and stay away from smoke and other air pollution. To get help quitting, ask your doctor or go to [www.lung.ca/quit](http://www.lung.ca/quit).

**Join a pulmonary rehabilitation program** or do other exercise, with your doctor's permission. Pulmonary rehabilitation (also called respiratory rehabilitation or rehab) is a class that teaches you to exercise and manage your symptoms. Pulmonary rehab participants exercise, learn breathing techniques, and get practical advice, like how to eat well, how to keep up your energy, and how to do chores with less effort. To learn about pulmonary rehabilitation programs in your area, ask your doctor, visit [www.lung.ca/rehab](http://www.lung.ca/rehab) or call our free BreathWorks COPD Helpline at 1-866-717-COPD (2673).

**Avoid the germs that can cause flare-ups:** wash your hands carefully and often. Get your flu and pneumonia shots.

**Exercise, eat well, keep a healthy weight and get plenty of rest.**

The Lung Association's COPD program can help you understand home oxygen and how to live with COPD.

*To find out more:*

- **Visit our website** at [www.lung.ca/copd](http://www.lung.ca/copd)
- **Call our free COPD Helpline at 1-866-717-COPD (2673).** A certified respiratory educator will answer your questions about COPD medicines, and anything else you'd like to know about COPD.
- **Ask your doctor**, pharmacist, or certified respiratory educator. For more information on COPD, phone **1-866-717-COPD (2673)** or visit us online at [www.lung.ca/copd](http://www.lung.ca/copd)

***The Lung Association's commitment to COPD education and research.***

Established in 1900, The Lung Association is one of Canada's oldest and most respected health charities. We're the leading national organization for science-based information, research, education, support programs and advocacy on COPD. We rely on donations from the public.

To make a donation, please call toll-free **1-888-566-LUNG (5864)** or visit [www.lung.ca](http://www.lung.ca).