
Using an Oxygen Tank at Home

Your healthcare provider has prescribed oxygen. This can help make breathing easier. You were shown in the hospital how to use your oxygen unit. Here are some tips on safely using oxygen at home. Do all steps each time you use your oxygen unit. The steps will vary based on the type of oxygen unit you use.

General tips

- Wash your hands before and after using your oxygen. Don't touch the oxygen unit if your hands are wet from using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Your hands must be totally dry before touching the oxygen unit.
- Ask your healthcare provider and medical supply company any questions you have. They can help you find out what is best for you.
- Keep the unit and tubing clean. This helps prevent breathing in germs. Ask the medical supply company about cleaning or taking care of your oxygen unit.

Step 1. Check your supply

- Pressurize your oxygen tank. This is for compressed tanks only. Other devices can simply be turned on. Follow the directions from your healthcare provider or medical supply company.
- Check the oxygen gauge on the tank to be sure you have enough. Your medical supply company will tell you when to call for more oxygen. Or they will deliver your oxygen on a regular schedule.
- Check the water level if you have a humidifier bottle. When the level is at or below half full, refill it with sterile or distilled water. Ask the company how often to change your humidifier bottle. This helps prevent germs.

Step 2. Attach the tubing

- Attach the nose tube (cannula) to your oxygen unit as you were shown.
- Check that the tubing is not bent or blocked.

Step 3. Set your flow rate

- Set the oxygen to flow at the rate your healthcare provider gave you. This is _____.
- Never change this rate unless your provider tells you to.

Step 4. Put the cannula in your nose

- Put the cannula in your nose. Breathe through your nose normally.
- If you are not sure if the oxygen is flowing, do a simple test. Put the cannula in a glass of water. Oxygen is flowing if the water bubbles.

Use oxygen safely

Follow all safety guidelines when using oxygen at home. Tips for safe use include:

- Stay at least 10 feet from open flames. And stay at least 5 feet from sources of a flame. These include cigarettes, matches, candles, fireplaces, gas burners, and pipes. Or anything else that could start a fire.
- Don't smoke. Don't be around others who are smoking. Post "no smoking" signs outside your home.
- Keep oxygen tanks at least 5 feet from any heat source. This includes gas stoves, space heaters, and electric and gas heaters.
- Keep the door to the room open. This helps to move air around. It keeps the room from being stuffy.
- Protect your oxygen tank from being knocked over.
- Store the oxygen tank upright in a secure, approved storage device.
- Turn the tank off right away if it is knocked over and makes a hissing noise. If the regulator breaks or you can't safely turn the tank off, remove the tubing and leave the room. Then call the supply company or the fire department right away.
- Be careful not to trip over the tubing.
- Don't use lotions or creams that have petroleum jelly. This can start a fire when mixed with oxygen. Use water-based products.
- Don't use aerosol sprays close to your oxygen unit. This includes hairspray and air fresheners. Aerosols are flammable.
- Don't use electrical devices like electric razors, heating pads, or hair dryers while wearing oxygen.
- Turn oxygen off when not using it.
- Follow the instructions for safe use from your supply company. Not using oxygen safely is dangerous. It can put you and your neighbors at higher risk for fires and burns.
- Know what to do in an emergency. Always have a fire extinguisher close by. Your emergency numbers should include 911, your healthcare provider, and your medical supply company.

Taking care of your unit

Talk with your medical supply company. They can tell you how often to change your tubing, cannula, and humidifier bottle, if you have one.

When to call the healthcare provider

Based on your healthcare provider's instructions, call your provider or 911 right away if you have any of these:

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- Pale skin or a blue color on your lips or fingernails
 - More shortness of breath, wheezing, or other changes from your normal breathing, even with oxygen
 - Confusion, restlessness, or more anxiety than normal
 - Chest pain