

Basic Care: Oxygen Use at Home

What is happening

Home oxygen is commonly used in hospice care to help improve comfort and reduce shortness of breath.

The oxygen in a tank or concentrator is:

- Highly concentrated
- Stored under pressure

Because of this, oxygen must be used carefully and safely.

Important safety information

Oxygen increases fire risk

Oxygen itself does not burn, but it can cause fires to start more easily and spread more quickly.

Smoking safety

- Never allow smoking in the same room as oxygen equipment

Keep oxygen away from heat

Keep oxygen equipment at least 10 feet away from:

- Heaters
- Stoves
- Candles
- Open flames

Avoid flammable products nearby

Do not use near oxygen:

- Aerosol sprays
- Alcohol-based lotions or rubs
- Ointments such as Vicks

Electrical safety

- Avoid extension cords near oxygen equipment
- Keep electrical devices and outlets safely away from oxygen sources

Safe storage and setup

- Secure oxygen tanks or concentrators so they cannot fall over
- Do not place oxygen equipment:
 - Under beds
 - Under blankets or clothing

Keep a fire extinguisher nearby if possible.

Using oxygen safely

The hospice team will provide:

- Oxygen equipment
- Tubing and supplies

The hospice nurse or doctor will explain:

- What oxygen flow rate to use
- How to turn the equipment on and off safely

Do not change the oxygen flow rate unless instructed by the hospice team.

Caring for tubing and comfort

- Replace tubing if it becomes:
 - Dirty
 - Damaged
 - Cracked

Ask the hospice team for replacement supplies.

Oxygen may cause dryness in the nose or mouth.

Humidifiers or moisture-support products may help.

Discuss options with the hospice team.

When to call hospice

- Oxygen equipment is not working properly
- Tubing is damaged or disconnected
- Shortness of breath is worsening
- You are unsure how to operate the equipment safely
- The patient appears uncomfortable despite oxygen use