

# Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) Handbook for Home Oxygen



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An electronic version of this document is available at [health.qld.gov.au/mass](https://health.qld.gov.au/mass)

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# Your Prescription

Recommended minimum hours per day:      Flow Rate (litres per minute)

At Rest:

During activity:

Sleeping:

## What is Oxygen Therapy?

Oxygen therapy is often used in hospital to treat people with heart and lung problems. However, it can also be used safely at home to treat these conditions, and to improve quality of life.

### What is the aim?

The aim of oxygen therapy is to increase low levels of oxygen in the blood, relax blood vessels in the lungs, and to avoid the long term problems that chronic low oxygen levels can cause.

## What are the benefits?

We all need oxygen to live. It passes from our lungs into our blood stream, where it is carried to our organs and tissues.

If you have a chronic respiratory or cardiac condition, your medical practitioner or medical specialist may prescribe oxygen at home. **It is important to follow this prescription.**

People who may need oxygen at home include those with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) such as emphysema, chronic bronchitis, alpha1 antitrypsin deficiency, pulmonary hypertension, heart failure, severe angina, life threatening asthma (rarely), cystic fibrosis, and lung cancer.

Oxygen at home has been proven to improve well being, quality of life and the longevity of people with COPD.

## How will I feel?

Your medical specialist and visiting community nurse will have informed you of the correct prescription for your oxygen usage i.e. number of hours per day and flow rate.

You will obtain the maximum benefit from your oxygen therapy by following the prescription provided to you by your medical specialist. You should ensure that you use the oxygen at the correct flow rate and for at least the number of hours recommended by your medical specialist.

In terms of hours of usage, normally your prescription would comprise one of the following:

- continuous 24 hrs per day oxygen
- at least 16 hrs per day oxygen
- supplemental oxygen needed during sleep periods only
- supplemental oxygen needed during exercise or activity only.

**NB. If your medical specialist has advised different arrangements to those mentioned above, it is important to follow the advice provided by your medical specialist.**

Most people notice some improvement when they start on oxygen at home. You may notice that you feel:

- more refreshed on waking;
- less breathless with activities like showering and walking;
- clearer thinking;
- more energetic.

Many different conditions can cause breathlessness. Oxygen is only used to treat breathlessness that is caused by low levels of oxygen in the blood.

If your condition changes for any reason, you must consult your visiting community nurse, medical specialist or your medical practitioner as soon as possible as your oxygen requirements may also have changed.

It is important not to change your flow rate without advice from your medical specialist.

## How is oxygen provided?

An oxygen concentrator is the most common method of providing oxygen. The air we breathe is made up of a mix of oxygen and nitrogen. A concentrator is an electronic pump that filters out the nitrogen and supplies oxygen through tubing.

Oxygen can also be provided via pre-filled cylinders.

A number of accessories are available for use with oxygen equipment including nasal cannulae, masks, tubing and swivel connectors, trolleys, crates, carry bags and restraints.

After being assessed, your medical specialist will determine the best equipment to meet your needs.

# MASS subsidised oxygen

MASS provides assistance in the form of:

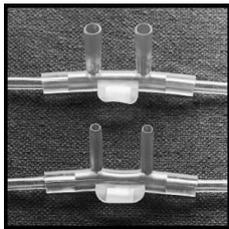
- Oxygen concentrator
- Nasal cannula
- Oxygen cylinders
- Oxygen tubing



**Oxygen concentrator**



**Oxygen cylinder**



**Nasal cannula**



**Oxygen tubing**

If approved to receive a MASS subsidised oxygen concentrator, you may be eligible for emergency back-up large or portable oxygen cylinders if you:

- are in a life threatening situation in the event of a power failure, and/or
- are dependent on oxygen for 24 hours per day.

To receive MASS subsidised back-up oxygen, you will need to be assessed by your medical specialist who can submit a request to MASS on your behalf. MASS will arrange to refill your back-up cylinder/s once every three months if requested.

Should you require replacement nasal cannulae, you can contact your MASS oxygen supplier who will post or deliver replacements on a complimentary basis.

If you are experiencing problems with your oxygen equipment, immediately telephone your MASS oxygen supplier who will be able to assist. Your oxygen supplier can be contacted 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The telephone number of your MASS oxygen supplier is displayed on your oxygen concentrator or cylinders.

## Personal care

It is important that you use your medications including oxygen as prescribed and develop an action plan with your medical specialist.

Oxygen therapy may sometimes cause irritation of the nose. To reduce the chance of this occurring, you need to take good care of your nose. The following tips should assist in minimising irritation:

- Apply a water based lubricant or sesame seed oil spray product to just inside the nostrils 2 to 3 times a day. These are available from most pharmacies.
- Try different shaped nasal prongs if irritation starts to occur. Your oxygen supplier will be able to provide these. The telephone number for your supplier is on your concentrator or cylinders.
- Clean the ends of the nasal prongs with soapy water and a soft cloth on a weekly basis. The nasal prongs should be changed every four to six weeks. MASS funds approximately twelve sets each year. If the nasal prongs have become hard or brittle, they should be changed earlier. You should contact your oxygen supplier to arrange a replacement.
- Adults should replace the nasal cannula every month.
- For children under 16 years of age, the nasal cannula should be replaced four times per month.

**NB: Never use petroleum jelly or other petroleum based lubricants with nasal prongs or nasal cannula as these products can be flammable and may irritate the lining of the nose.**

## What can I do?

It is important that you discuss an appropriate level of physical activity with your medical specialist or medical practitioner.

In terms of physical activity during oxygen usage, you may be able to do some activities with oxygen that you could not do previously. You may also find that you can do some activities without the oxygen.

Some very light activity such as short 10 minute walks a few times a day may be appropriate. If you place the concentrator beside the door, you may be able to stroll in the garden, sit outside or do some light gardening.

Currently, lengths of tubing vary between suppliers but generally ten metres is provided along with an additional smaller length of tubing. Swivel connectors are also provided giving a minimum total length of 12 metres if required.

See your medical practitioner as soon as possible if your condition is, or symptoms are, worsening.

Your medical specialist or medical practitioner may recommend that you undertake a pulmonary or cardiac rehabilitation course. These programs have been shown to improve quality of life for people with heart and lung conditions.

There are other options to help you maintain or improve your quality of life. You can contact a support group, such as the Heart Foundation or a patient support group through Lung Foundation Australia (refer to page 13 for contact details). Action plans are available from the Australian Lung Foundation.

## Eligibility for portable oxygen

**The Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) does not provide oxygen to adults for community access.**

MASS will only fund portable oxygen for infants and children up to 16 years of age and adults awaiting heart/lung transplant.

If you wish to hire portable oxygen, you can do so privately through an oxygen supplier. It is suggested that a number of oxygen suppliers be considered in order to obtain the best service and price for your circumstances.

It is also advisable to consider the costs associated with monthly rental, cylinder refills and delivery of oxygen to your home. If possible, it may be more economical to make arrangements to collect refilled cylinders from the supplier, rather than pay delivery costs.

You are not obliged to privately rent portable oxygen from the same company that is supplying your MASS subsidised equipment.

## Re-application and review

**Adults** (sixteen years of age and over), need to reapply to MASS and be reviewed by a **medical specialist** three to four months after starting on home oxygen. Some conditions improve after a few months and oxygen may no longer be required. Following the initial supply of oxygen by MASS, you should make an appointment in advance with your medical specialist for three to four months after initial supply.

If oxygen is continued after the first review, annual reviews and reapplications are required. It is not necessary to see a medical specialist for subsequent annual reapplications. Your medical specialist or medical practitioner can apply to MASS on your behalf for annual reapplications.

**Children between six and fifteen years of age** will need to reapply six months after the initial application. This requires review by a **medical specialist**. If oxygen is continued after the first review, annual reviews by a **medical specialist** and reapplications are required. However, if living in a remote area, the child's medical practitioner or paediatrician is able to apply to MASS on their behalf with endorsement from a MASS designated medical specialist prescriber.

**Children under six years of age** will need to reapply every six months until they turn six years of age, after which annual reviews and reapplications are required. This requires

review by a **medical specialist**. However, if living in a remote area, the child's medical practitioner or paediatrician is able to apply to MASS on their behalf with endorsement from a MASS designated medical specialist prescriber.

It is necessary to contact MASS to request an extension if there are any reasons why your re-application will be delayed.

Your designated MASS prescriber (medical specialist or general practitioner) needs to complete Part B of the MASS application form.

The due date for your next reapplication will be on your last approval letter for MASS subsidised oxygen.

MASS will also send you a reminder letter and a blank reapplication form approximately three months prior to your annual reapplication due date.

**If appropriate application forms are not received by MASS, payment for ongoing oxygen beyond the MASS approved funding periods will become your responsibility.**

## Advice for families of paediatric clients

In principle, the recommended care in this booklet also applies to babies and children on home oxygen therapy. However, the following information may be helpful:

- It is appropriate to ask your child's medical practitioners and nurses lots of questions and make sure you are clear on how to manage the oxygen for your child.
- Each children's facility has specific information packages for paediatric oxygen treatment. Please ensure you have received these information packages.
- It is especially important to follow the oxygen prescription as infants and children need good oxygen levels for growth and development.
- Safety aspects are the same for adults and children (see below).
- To keep a baby's nose clear, use two drops of normal saline nose drops at least twice a day and clean with a moistened cotton bud.
- A dietician's review is recommended as some infants on oxygen may need extra calories added to their feeds to help with growth.

If you have any doubts or questions regarding your child's oxygen usage, please ring the telephone number supplied by the treating facility.

# Safety information - Is home oxygen safe?

Yes, home oxygen is very safe providing safe practices are followed. Oxygen and oxygen cylinders do not explode. However, you should take a few simple precautions.

## YOU MUST:

- follow the prescription (flow rate and duration of use) as advised by your medical specialist
- use only the oxygen equipment prescribed by your medical specialist (e.g. regulator)
- observe safety precautions when using oxygen and equipment, including tubing and nasal cannula
- secure cylinders to prevent them falling to avoid damage to the equipment or injury to a person
- promptly report any problems with the oxygen equipment to the supplier
- obtain verbal and written instructions from the oxygen supplier for the safe transport of oxygen equipment before transporting large oxygen cylinders or concentrators outside the home environment
- note that the following are **SAFE** heat sources for oxygen users - oil heaters, air conditioners, and electric blankets
- For concentrator users only, before powering your concentrator with a generator, contact your oxygen supplier for instructions and advice
- For concentrator users only, develop emergency plans for use in the event of an electricity power failure.

## DO NOT:

- stand at the stove while hot plates are on (e.g. stirring a pot) when you are using oxygen. Where possible use a microwave oven.
- use gas ovens and/or stove tops whilst on oxygen due to naked flames.
- smoke or allow others to smoke near the oxygen equipment
- have any source of unsafe heat or flames (e.g. matches, candles, open fires, gas stoves, vacuum cleaners, bar heaters, wood fires etc) near the concentrator/cylinder
- place the concentrator/cylinder or tubing near anything that may cause sparks
- use grease or lubricants on or near the equipment
- attempt to repair or modify or use any sealants on the oxygen equipment.

# Oxygen and Smoking

**For the safety of our clients and others, MASS will not subsidy fund oxygen to anyone who is a current smoker.**

People requesting subsidy funding for oxygen through MASS are required to quit smoking prior to making application to MASS as smoking compromises the benefit of oxygen therapy and is an extreme fire and safety risk.

**You must never allow others to smoke in the vicinity of your oxygen or use your oxygen near sources of sparks, open flames, unsafe heat sources or flammable products.**



## Maintenance

Your oxygen supplier is required to perform a maintenance check of your oxygen equipment every twelve months.

This may involve a maintenance officer coming to your home to perform the maintenance check or the supplier may deliver newly tested equipment to your home to replace your old equipment.

If you have any concerns regarding your oxygen equipment, you should contact the oxygen supplier in the first instance.

# What should I do in a power failure or if my concentrator stops working?

All oxygen users should complete the “Emergency Power Failure Plan” located on page 15 of this booklet. Please keep this book in an accessible location.

**When on oxygen therapy, it is important to have a kit with a torch and battery operated radio in a handy position in the event of a power failure. DO NOT USE CANDLES.**

If possible, it is important to have a telephone that is not dependant on electricity. This will enable you to call your electricity supplier to ascertain how long the power failure is likely to continue.

If it appears that the power failure will be rectified reasonably quickly, try to relax and continue taking your normal medications.

If using oxygen 24 hours per day, switch to your back up cylinder.

If using oxygen to assist physical activity, stop what you are doing and rest.

You may be able to power your oxygen concentrator with a generator. However, before doing so, you must contact your oxygen supplier for details on minimum generator specifications.

If in doubt, call an ambulance or go to your nearest hospital (if practical) for alternate oxygen supply.

If experiencing minor problems with an oxygen concentrator, the oxygen supplier will provide you with “trouble shooting” instructions and methods to address minor problems. If this doesn’t correct the problem, report the issue to your oxygen supplier.

**Do not** place the concentrator/cylinder or tubing near any flames or heat sources such as bar heaters, wood fires, candles.

**Do not** use grease or lubricants on or near the equipment.

## Electricity Rebate

All oxygen concentrators use power and may increase your power bills. If using a concentrator supplied by MASS, you are entitled to an electricity rebate on your bill.

When your application was initially approved, MASS forwarded an *Electricity Life Support Concession form* to you for completion and return to Concession Services, Smart Service Queensland. When approved, the subsidy is deposited directly into a nominated bank account on a quarterly basis by Smart Service Queensland.

Concession Services may be contacted on telephone number 13 74 68 for additional information.

## Coping with oxygen at home

Some people who require oxygen feel that they have become “tied to the machine” or worry that they may become “addicted to oxygen”.

These initial feelings are normal, but generally people notice that their quality of life improves with oxygen and they are able to do more than previously. Home oxygen allows more control in people’s lives and usually improves the way they feel, compared to being in hospital for long periods. Remember that we all need oxygen to live!

The purpose of home oxygen therapy is to make things better for you and to improve your quality of life. If you find that things are more difficult, or if you have further questions, there are many people available to you including staff from your local Community Health Centre, domiciliary nurses, your medical practitioner, your medical specialist, respiratory nurse, and your current oxygen supplier.

For people with cardiac disease, it is suggested that you contact Heart Support Australia on telephone number 02 6253 0097.

## Lung and Heart Foundation contacts

Lung Foundation Australia	The Heart Foundation
<b>Telephone:</b> 1800 654 301 or 3251 3600	<b>Telephone:</b> 13 11 12 or 3872 2500
<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:enquiries@lungfoundation.com.au">enquiries@lungfoundation.com.au</a>	<b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:health@heartfoundation.org.au">health@heartfoundation.org.au</a>
<b>Postal Address:</b> Lung Foundation Australia PO Box 1949 Milton QLD 4064	<b>Postal Address:</b> Heart Foundation 557 Gregory Terrace Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

# Important Telephone Numbers

Organisation/Group	Telephone Number
Oxygen Supplier	
Community Health Centre	
Domiciliary Nurses (eg Blue Care, Spiritus etc.)	
Respiratory Medical Specialist	
General Practitioner	
Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme	07 3136 3510
Respiratory Nurse	
Support Group	

# EMERGENCY POWER FAILURE PLAN

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 USE A TORCH FOR LIGHTING
- 2 DO NOT USE MATCHES, CANDLES OR A NAKED FLAME
- 3 USE OXYGEN CYLINDER IF AVAILABLE
- 4 MY FLOW RATE AS ADVISED BY MY MEDICAL PRACTITIONER IS \_\_\_\_\_ LITRES PER MINUTE
- 5 TELEPHONE ELECTRICITY SUPPLIER TO SEE HOW LONG THE POWER FAILURE WILL LAST
- 6 TELEPHONE APPROPRIATE EMERGENCY CONTACTS AS LISTED
- 7 LIMIT MY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY
- 8 LISTEN TO A BATTERY POWERED RADIO FOR UPDATES
- 9 (HAVE SPARE BATTERIES FOR EMERGENCY USE)

## Telephone numbers for contact in a power emergency

NAME	Telephone Number
ELECTRICITY SUPPLIER	
AMBULANCE	0 0 0
MEDICAL PRACTITIONER	
FRIEND/NEIGHBOUR or RELATIVE	

If a telephone is unavailable my plan is: