

LEARN ABOUT OXYGEN THERAPY

Learn About Oxygen Therapy

Your body needs a certain amount of oxygen for its organs to function properly. But as idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF) progresses, the fibrosis prevents enough oxygen from being transferred into your bloodstream. This is why your doctor may prescribe supplemental oxygen therapy as part of your care. (Learn [how your lungs work.](#))



Learn about getting started on oxygen therapy.

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“If low oxygen levels are assessed while resting, during sleep, or with activity—oxygen therapy will be prescribed by your doctor. Your prescription will include how much to use and when. Generally, oxygen therapy is adjusted to support an oxygen level of at least 90 percent. Guidelines include starting oxygen therapy when levels are 88 percent or below.”

Trina Limberg, *Director of Pulmonary Rehabilitation at UC SD Medical Center*

Your doctor will use tests, such as an arterial blood gas test and a pulse oximetry test, to determine whether you need oxygen therapy and, if so, how often and how much. These tests measure how much oxygen is in your blood. A low level of oxygen is a sign that you need oxygen therapy. The tests should be obtained when resting, during activity such as walking, and—in some instances—during sleep as oxygen levels can vary depending on what you are doing. Some people with IPF may have relatively normal oxygen levels while resting or when seated, but low oxygen levels when walking or doing other physically exerting activities. That’s because many muscle groups are used with these particular activities.



“To assess your needs, your doctor will measure your blood oxygen level using a small device that fits on your finger called a pulse oximeter. If it is below 88%, oxygen therapy is often normally recommended.”

How Oxygen Is Delivered

Oxygen therapy is provided in a metal cylinder or other container. It flows through a tube and is delivered to your lungs in one of the following ways:



Nasal cannula

Face mask

Your doctor will work with you to determine which type of oxygen delivery device you should use, as well as how much oxygen you need and how often.



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The Possible Benefits and Risks of Oxygen Therapy

The use of supplemental oxygen in people with IPF who have low oxygen levels at rest has been shown to:

- Reduce general breathlessness
- Sustain their ability to perform activities (such as exercise) that may be part of a pulmonary rehabilitation program
- Possibly maintain their ability to take part in daily activities in preparation for a lung transplant

In addition to reducing breathlessness, in studies of people using oxygen therapy to treat COPD, patients reported that oxygen therapy improved their ability to perform everyday activities such as cleaning, reading, and shaving.

However, it's important to note that there are a number of risks that come along with using oxygen therapy, including a number of possible complications and side effects, such as:

- Dry or bloody nose
- Skin irritation from the nasal cannula or face mask
- Fatigue

Tell your doctor if these problems persist. Your doctor may be able to help relieve some or all of these issues.

If you start using home oxygen therapy, you should ask your home equipment provider to give you a complete list of safety steps you'll need to follow.

The Importance of Sticking with Your Therapy

Remember to use oxygen therapy as prescribed by your doctor. While some people may feel embarrassed by having to use oxygen therapy in public, remember that it's an important medical therapy. Low blood oxygen levels can lead to additional health problems. Your need to use oxygen therapy shouldn't prevent you from taking part in social activities.
