Oxygen Therapy in the Hospital

Sometimes your body needs extra oxygen to help it work properly and heal. To make sure your body gets all the oxygen it needs during your stay, do not take off your oxygen tube or mask for any reason.

Your healthcare provider may order oxygen therapy for you during your stay in the hospital. This is especially true if you have a lung or heart problem that makes it hard for you to breathe. This order tells your care team how much oxygen (in liters per minute or L/m) you need while sitting, exercising, and sleeping. It also tells how your oxygen should be delivered.

**How is oxygen delivered?**

Oxygen can be delivered to your lungs through a number of different devices that fit on your nose and mouth.

- A **cannula** is a narrow tube made from soft plastic. It has two small openings (prongs) that are put into your nostrils. It can deliver oxygen at a rate of up to 6 L/m.

- A **reservoir cannula** can deliver oxygen at a higher rate — from 1 to 12 L/m. It is only for people who cannot use a regular cannula or mask and are going home with oxygen.

- A **simple face mask** is a small plastic shield that fits over your nose and mouth. An elastic band is put around the back of your head to hold it in place. The mask has holes on the side to let exhaled air (the air you breathe out) escape and room air to enter. It can deliver oxygen at a rate of 6 to 10 L/m.

- A **non-rebreather mask** also fits over your nose and mouth. A small bag, called an oxygen reservoir, is attached to the mask. This allows higher concentrations to be delivered to patients who have a very high oxygen need. This device is used when you need 15 or more L/m of oxygen.

- A **high-flow nebulizer** is a device that is used when a lot of oxygen is needed (6 or more L/m). It adds moisture to the oxygen during delivery, and also allows your care team to see how much oxygen you use. Patients who need a high flow nebulizer usually have an aerosol mask or tracheostomy mask. (Tracheostomy is also called a “trach” and sounds like “trake.”)

*Never take off your oxygen or someone else’s oxygen without the help of a nurse or respiratory therapist.*
Questions for my doctor

Use this space to write down any questions you may have about your oxygen therapy or the care of your loved one. Show your questions to your healthcare provider.