



DO I STILL NEED OXYGEN?

Once people have been using oxygen for a while a common question is, “Do I still need to keep wearing this oxygen?” When your doctor originally ordered it, he or she may not have told you how long it would be necessary or how you can tell if and when it can be discontinued. If this is the case for you, this information may help to guide you in talking with your physician about the decision to discontinue using your oxygen.

“I don’t feel like I need it.” You can’t always go by the way that you feel. Some people will experience symptoms such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing and have a normal blood oxygen level. Others may experience no such symptoms and have a low blood oxygen level. Even though these symptoms are very important to watch and consider, you can’t make the decision to discontinue the oxygen based solely upon symptoms. The **only** way to know for sure is to have your blood oxygen level checked.

“How do they check my blood oxygen level?” There are two ways your blood oxygen level can be checked. The first way, known as an arterial blood gas or ABG is by taking a sample of blood from your artery. The downside of this test is that it only shows your blood oxygen level at the particular moment the blood is drawn. Most people with heart and lung disorders have a blood oxygen level that will vary depending upon what they are doing. So an ABG may show an adequate blood oxygen level while you are resting (which is usually when it is measured) but not reveal what your oxygen level is when you are walking or sleeping, which is usually when your level is low.

The second method called oximetry is done by placing a small probe on your finger or ear. This probe is attached to a small box which records a **continuous** measurement of your blood oxygen level. The big advantage of this method is that it allows your physician to see exactly what your blood oxygen level is doing at various times such as when you walk. In fact, to get the full picture, you should be tested at rest, during activity, and during sleep as levels may vary significantly at these various times. If this test is normal, then your physician will probably discontinue the oxygen. But your oxygen should never be discontinued without first performing this test.



If your blood oxygen level is low, failure to use the oxygen as prescribed will result in stress to the heart and has been shown to result in shorter life expectancy

“What happens if I just quit using it?” If you don’t use your oxygen and your level is still low, studies have shown that you will not live as long or have as good a quality of life as those who use the oxygen appropriately. A low oxygen level stresses your entire body but especially the heart. The pressures inside the heart are increased causing it to enlarge and to not function as well, a condition known as *cor pulmonale*. So going without the oxygen means more than just putting up with the shortness of breath, it will affect your entire body.

“If my doctor does not discontinue it, can’t I just have you pick it up?” Your oxygen was prescribed for you by your physician and thus for us to discontinue its use requires your physician's approval. The only other option is for you to sign a release of liability. This releases us and your physician of responsibility for any consequences of your decision to go against your doctor's wishes by not using the oxygen.

“How can I be tested?” You can talk directly with your physician or call us and we will contact the doctor for you. Upon the doctor’s approval, arrangements will be made to perform the test. The transition to using oxygen can sometimes be difficult. If you have encountered problems in using your oxygen, speak with your respiratory therapist and they can offer solutions to most of these concerns. We want the best for you and your situation.



If we can be of any further assistance in answering your questions, always feel free to call.