

Organisation for the Understanding of Cluster Headaches

OXYGEN (O₂) THERAPY – General Information

Approximately 80% of CH sufferers find inhaling oxygen at 7 to 12 litres per minute very effective in dealing with cluster attacks. The oxygen should be administered using a high flow regulator (low flow 2 – 4 litres per minute will not abort a CH attack). Some people find O₂ on its own quickly aborts an attack, some use it while waiting for other abortives to “kick in” - but most report that for maximum effect and quick relief it must be taken as early as possible at the start of an attack.

The time taken for O₂ therapy to be effective can vary, but most say they can abort an attack within 10-15 minutes: if not actually aborted in this time, the majority of people say the pain level reduces very quickly.

As soon as you know an attack is starting, inhale the oxygen at between 8 – 15 litres per minute (adjust the flow to keep the reservoir bag on the mask inflated). Some sufferers stay on oxygen for an additional 5 – 10 minutes after the attack has gone, at a lower flow rate to “mop up” the attack. If the oxygen has had no effect after 20 minutes, switch off and try again with another attack, don't give up on the first attempt.

Your GP will need to complete a Home Oxygen Order Form which will be faxed to the oxygen company and they will contact you direct to arrange delivery. Details of the requirements for the HOOOF are attached. The oxygen company will supply the cylinder, complete with the correct flow regulator and non-rebreather masks and tubing.

It is important to follow the instructions on the O₂ cylinder and also **please** remember that Oxygen is a very combustible material – do not smoke or use naked flames near it! For further safety advice, contact your oxygen supplier. (See separate list of O₂ regional suppliers and contact details.)

In Scotland the new HOTS (Home Oxygen Therapy Scheme) is not in operation, in which case your GP can continue to write a prescription, as before, for a 1360 litre AF cylinder for which you will need a high flow regulator (high flow regs are not available on the NHS).

OUCH (UK) operates a Loan Regulator scheme (a Member Benefit) and for a deposit of £27.50 inc P&P. If oxygen therapy works for you, then you can purchase the regulator outright, by forwarding a cheque for the balance (£114.50) to OUCH (UK). (See separate details with the Loan Regulator Application Form). If O₂ does not work for you (about 20% of sufferers find it does not work for them) then you can return the regulator and your deposit will be refunded.

The non-rebreather masks (2) are available from OUCH for £6.95 inc of P&P.

It would be advisable to notify your local fire station that you will be storing Oxygen on your premises. Also, we suggest you inform your home insurers if you store oxygen on the premises and also your car insurers if you carry portable oxygen in your vehicle. This will not affect your premiums, but if you make a claim and the insurers discover you did not declare you had O₂ on the premises or in the vehicle, they may invalidate your claim.

Using oxygen can dry the nasal passages and the skin surrounding nose and mouth, you are advised not to use petroleum jelly or petroleum based skin products, due to their combustible nature with oxygen. A water based gel is suggested instead.

Finally it is very useful to have feedback on how you found the treatment. Keep us informed via our message board or by writing to us.

OUCH (UK) 24 Hour Info line phone: 01646 651 979

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