

Lung function

Portable oxygen for air travel

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

If you have a respiratory condition, your consultant may have told you that you need oxygen to fly. Your doctor will decide whether you need to have a special test, known as a hypoxic challenge test, to determine this – not everyone will need one.

Arrange oxygen if you need it

If you've been told by your doctor that you need oxygen to fly, then you must arrange this before you travel.

Your doctor (normally a respiratory consultant – not your GP) should have told you how much oxygen you need. This is known as a flow rate. It is normally in litres per minute (L/min).

This flow rate may be different to what you have at home (if you are on home oxygen).

You should have your prescription in a written document so you can show it to the airline and the oxygen hire company.

Always keep this with you during travel.

Some airlines will provide oxygen, though they may charge for it. But a lot of airlines now require you to provide your own.

Get permission from airport and airline

Airports and airlines need to know **before** travel that you intend to carry oxygen with you.

- **you must have their permission**
- give them as much notice as possible, particularly with international flights
- check the airline's website to see what information they need from you and your doctor
- if you need assistance on airport transfers, arrange this with them in advance
- use the airport's mobility assistance to avoid getting more breathless than necessary

Arrange a private supply – you cannot take NHS oxygen

You cannot take home oxygen provided by the NHS abroad with you. (You might get this via an external supplier like Air Liquide, BOC or Baywater, but it is still provided by the NHS).

It is likely you signed a document when you received your kit to say that you would not take it abroad. This rule exists because the kit is loaned to you for use in the UK. If it's taken abroad, it could be lost or damaged.

There are companies who will hire out portable oxygen to you.

Portable oxygen concentrators

Air safety regulators do not allow you to take your own compressed or liquid oxygen cylinders on a flight. Portable oxygen concentrators (POC) are a good alternative option.

POCs are machines that make oxygen from the air around them. They must be charged up and so need an electricity supply. Once charged, the length of time they last will depend on the flow rate used. For example, a setting of 2 will last around 4 hours.

POCs are useful if you do not require too much oxygen. But if you need a higher flow rate, POCs may not provide what you need and flying may not be possible.

Any oxygen machine you hire must be Federal Aviation Approved (FAA) to be allowed on board an aircraft. So, please check before you hire.

Batteries and charging

You can also hire extra batteries. This means the POC will work for longer without being recharged.

The FAA insists that you have enough battery life to last the duration of your flight. Indeed, many airlines say that your device must last 150% of the expected flight duration, in case of delays. For example, if your flight time is 2 hours, you will need a device that has enough power for 3 hours.

You can ask if you can have a seat next to a power port, so you can charge it up, should you need to.

Arranging in-flight oxygen

Check the airline's policy on oxygen – you can find this on their website. If they supply it, you can arrange it with the airline directly.

You will need the doctor's letter or a completed medical information form (MEDIF). This should state:

- that you need oxygen to fly
- how much oxygen you need

If the airline **does not** supply oxygen, you will need to hire your own.

You can find details of oxygen hire companies on the internet. We are not affiliated with any and cannot recommend a particular one, but two we have found are listed below. Call a few to ensure you get the best deal from your hire.

You will need to tell them how much oxygen the doctor says you need.

Remember, you will need oxygen for your outbound **and** inbound flights.

Oxygen hire companies

These are two companies we have found that will rent out portable oxygen for travel. (Other companies are available). Both provide POCs for hire for flying. They will also provide concentrators for your destination if you need oxygen on land as well.

Pure O2

Call: 0161 747 2617

Email: info@healthoxygen.com

Website: www.healthoxygen.com

Also sells new devices.

The Oxygen Store

Call: 0345 100 0084

Email: admin@baro2.com

Website: www.omega-oxygen.com

Also sells pre-owned and new devices.

Consider the risks of buying

There are risks to buying your own POC, so please think carefully about doing this.

Questions to ask yourself:

- 1. What if my prescription changes to one that my machine does not support?**
- 2. What would happen if my machine stopped working or needed maintenance or repair?** It is specialist equipment and would not be supported by your home oxygen provider like your home oxygen kit is (if you have oxygen at home).
- 3. What's the ongoing cost of keeping the machine in good working order?** This could easily mount up.

Travel insurance

You need to tell your travel insurance company that you will be flying with oxygen.

Further support and guidance

You can get more information and guidance about flying with oxygen from:



Asthma+Lung UK

www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/living-with/travel/oxygen



European Lung Foundation

europeanlung.org/en/information-hub/living-with-a-lung-condition/air-travel/

How do I give feedback about my visit?

We want to hear your **suggestions** or **comments**. Your feedback helps us provide the best service. You can always speak to a member of staff.

You can also contact the **patient advice and liaison service (PALS)** on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 to 16.00, Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays) or email at imperial.pals@nhs.net. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or questions and they can help solve problems.

You can make a complaint by ringing **020 3312 1337 / 1349** or emailing tr.Complaints@nhs.net. The address is Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

Other ways to read this leaflet

Please email us at imperial.communications@nhs.net if you need this leaflet in a different format. This could be large print, Easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in a different language.

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

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