

Using Oxygen Safely at Home

PLEASE READ BEFORE YOU START • KEEP THIS WITH YOUR MACHINE

Oxygen itself does not burn and will not explode. What it does is make **everything else burn far more easily, faster and hotter** — clothing, bedding, hair, beards, even skin and fabric that oxygen has soaked into. A fire that would normally be manageable can become serious in seconds. Your concentrator is safe, well-made equipment; these precautions are about the room it runs in.

FIRE RISK — THE FIVE THAT MATTER MOST

- **Keep three metres clear.** Three metres between your machine, tubing and cannula and any flame, heat or spark — gas cooktops, ovens, heaters, open fires, BBQs, toasters and pilot lights.
- **No candles anywhere in the room.** That includes scented candles, tealights, oil burners, incense and diffusers with a flame. They are easy to forget because they are lit for atmosphere rather than for light.
- **No smoking. None.** Not by you, not by anyone else in the room, and not while the machine is merely switched on. That includes e-cigarettes and vapes — they contain a heating element and a battery.
- **No oil, grease or petroleum products.** Not on your face, lips, hands or in your nose while using oxygen. That rules out petroleum jelly and Vaseline, Paw Paw ointment, Vicks VapoRub and most lip balms. Water-based only.
- **Keep aerosols and flammable liquids out of the room.** Hairspray, deodorant, air freshener, cleaning fluids, hand sanitiser, petrol, paint and thinners.

EVERYDAY USE

- **Let it breathe.** A concentrator gets warm while it works. Keep clear space around the intake and vents, never cover it, and never run it inside a cupboard, under a bed or beneath bedding.
- **Plug straight into a wall socket.** Not into an extension lead, power board or double adaptor.
- **Put the electricals away.** Avoid hairdryers, electric razors and electric blankets while oxygen is running.
- **Keep it clean and keep it clear.** Dust is the enemy of the compressor, so follow the filter cleaning schedule in your manual. Route long tubing where nobody walks — it is a trip hazard.

TELL THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU

- Make sure everyone in the household knows oxygen is in use, and knows the rules about flame, smoking and petroleum products.
- Tell visitors and tradespeople before they light anything.
- Check your **smoke alarms** work and test them monthly.
- Some households display an **oxygen-in-use notice** at the front door so visitors and emergency crews know before they come in. Safety sign suppliers sell them from a few dollars — search for “oxygen in use sign”.

The current version of this sheet is always at www.mec.com.au. This sheet is general safety information. It does not replace the advice of your prescriber or the user manual supplied with your device. **Continued overleaf** →

Power, planning and emergencies

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REGISTER AS A LIFE SUPPORT CUSTOMER — DO THIS FIRST

If someone at your address depends on an oxygen concentrator, ring your **electricity retailer** and ask to be registered as a life support customer. It is free, and it is the most useful phone call you will make this week.

- Your retailer will send a **medical confirmation form** for your doctor to complete.
- Once registered, your supply is **protected from disconnection**, and you must be given at least **four business days' written notice** of any planned interruption.
- **Rebates are available** in New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT. Ask when you register.
- Ring them again if you **move house or switch retailers** — registration does not follow you automatically.

HAVE A PLAN FOR BLACKOUTS

- **Torches, never candles.** A blackout is exactly when people reach for candles, and exactly when you will be running on battery. Keep a torch or battery lantern where you can find it in the dark, with spare batteries beside it.
- Keep your spare battery charged, and know how long it lasts **at your prescribed setting** — not the headline figure on the box. Runtime falls steeply as the setting rises.
- Keep a **backup oxygen supply** available in case of a power failure or a fault. Ask us what suits your prescription.

IF THERE IS A FIRE

- **Switch the concentrator off at the wall** if it is safe to do so, and take the cannula off.
- **Get out and stay out.** Call 000 from outside.
- **Tell the operator there is oxygen equipment in the house**, and tell the crew when they arrive. It changes how they approach the fire.

A note on your prescription. Your flow setting was chosen by a qualified practitioner — please do not change it yourself. On a pulse dose machine the setting numbers are not litres per minute. If your therapy does not seem right, ring your prescriber.

IF YOU SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO USES OXYGEN

For support workers, carers and accommodation providers — a few things that sit alongside the household precautions.

- **Put it in the care plan.** The three-metre rule, the no-smoking rule and the petroleum-product rule should be written down, not remembered. Everyone rostered on needs to have read them.
- **Brief agency and casual staff every time.** The person who has never worked that shift before is the one who lights a candle.
- **Where a participant smokes despite advice**, that belongs in a documented risk assessment rather than a verbal reminder. Some concentrators include a fire breaker that cuts oxygen flow if a flame reaches the outlet — ask us which models have one.
- **Record and report incidents**, including near misses. A scorched cannula with nobody hurt is the warning that lets you prevent the next one.

Questions? Ring us on 1300 632 633 — we would far rather answer one now. This sheet is general safety information and does not replace your prescriber's advice or your user manual.