

## Chronic Lung Disease: Avoiding Irritants and Allergens



Chronic lung disease may include COPD, which is chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It may also include pulmonary fibrosis, sarcoidosis and other long-term respiratory conditions. Many people with chronic lung disease need to stay away from irritants that can trigger symptoms. These symptoms makes it harder to breathe. Irritants are certain substances in the air that irritate the airways. Some people are also sensitive to certain allergens. These are substances that cause swelling (inflammation) in the lungs. Allergens can also cause a runny nose or itchy, watery eyes. You likely can't stay away from all these things, all the time. But you'll most likely breathe better if you stay away from the things that bother you.

### Try to stay away from...

**Smoke.** This includes cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and fireplaces. If you smoke, quit. Smoking is the main cause of COPD. Quitting will help you be able to better manage your condition.

- Don't smoke and stay away from secondhand smoke. And don't let others smoke near you or in your home.
- Don't use e-cigarettes or vaping products, because they have harmful side effects.
- Ask for smoke-free hotel rooms and rental cars.
- Make sure fireplaces and wood stoves are well ventilated. And sit well away from them.

**Smog.** This is made up of car exhaust and other air pollutants.

- Check local air quality reports. These let you know when air quality is poor.
- Stay indoors as much as you can on smoggy days.
- Avoid outdoor pollution such as dusts, vapors, fumes, gases, and other chemicals.

**Strong odors.** These include scented room fresheners, mothballs, and insect sprays. Perfume and

cooking can also cause strong odors.

- Don't use bleach or ammonia for cleaning.
- Use scent-free deodorant, lotion, and other products.
- Stay away from indoor pollution such as burning wood, smoke from home cooking, or heating fuels.

**Other irritants.** These include dust, aerosol sprays, and fine powders.

- Wear a mask while doing tasks such as dusting, sweeping, and yard work.

**Cold weather.** This can make it harder to breathe.

- Protect your lungs by wearing a scarf over your nose and mouth.

### You may also need to stay away from...

If you have allergies, try to stay away from the allergens that cause them. If you are allergic to many things, think about being tested for specific allergens. Ask your healthcare provider if you need to stay away from any of these:

**Pollen.** This is a fine powder made by trees, grasses, and weeds.

- Try to learn what types of pollen affect you the most. Pollen levels change during the year.
- Don't do outdoor activities when pollen levels are high. Use air conditioning. Don't open the windows in your home and car.

**Animal dander.** This is shed by animals with fur or feathers. The particles can float through the air. They stick to carpet, clothing, and furniture.

- Wash your hands and clothes after handling pets.

**Dust mites.** These are tiny bugs too small to see. They live in mattresses, bedding, carpets, curtains, and indoor dust.

- Wash bedding in hot water (130°F/54.4°C) each week.
- Cover mattresses and pillows with special mite-proof cases.

**Mold.** This grows in damp places such as bathrooms, basements, and closets.

- Use an exhaust fan while bathing. Or leave a window open in the bathroom.
- Use a dehumidifier in damp places.

### Call 911

Call 911 if you have a severe reaction such as:

- Vomiting
- Coughing
- Diarrhea
- Hives

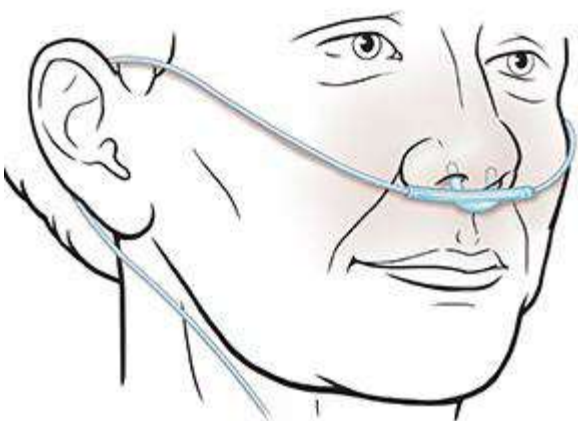
- Swelling
- Tongue swelling
- Throat closing
- Wheezing
- Problems breathing
- Can't talk
- Chest tightness
- Feeling faint
- A sense or feeling of doom

Ask your healthcare provider or an allergy specialist to test you for specific antigens. This can help prevent severe reactions.

## Chronic Lung Disease: If Oxygen Is Prescribed

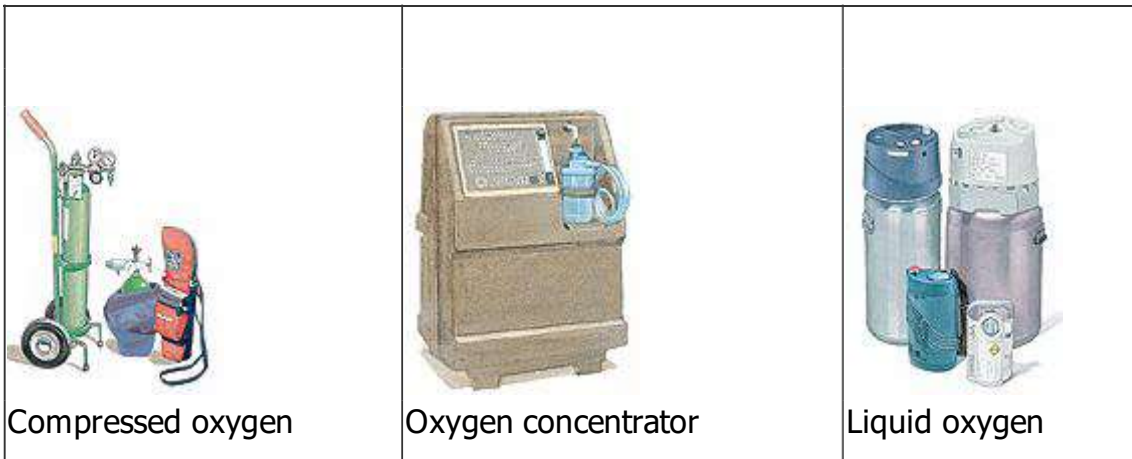
Supplemental oxygen is prescribed if tests show that the oxygen level in your blood is too low. If the level stays too low for too long, serious problems can occur in many parts of the body. Supplemental oxygen helps to ease your symptoms and prevent future problems by getting more oxygen to the blood. Depending on your test results, you may need oxygen all the time. Or it may only be needed during certain activities, such as exercise or sleep. When oxygen is prescribed, you'll be referred to a medical equipment company. They will set up the oxygen unit and teach you how to use it.

### Nasal Cannula



Oxygen is most often inhaled through a nasal cannula. This is a lightweight tube. It has 2 hollow prongs that fit just inside the nose.

## Types of supplemental oxygen



Prescribed oxygen comes in several forms. You may use more than 1 type, depending on when you need oxygen:

- **Compressed oxygen.** This is oxygen gas stored in a tank. The oxygen is stored under pressure. So these tanks must be handled carefully. Gauges on the tank can be used to adjust the oxygen flow rate. Your healthcare provider will figure out what this should be. Small tanks can be carried. Larger tanks are on wheels. They can be pulled around the house.
- **An oxygen concentrator.** This is a machine about the size of a large suitcase. It plugs into an electrical outlet. (A back-up oxygen supply is recommended in case of a power outage.) The machine takes oxygen from the air and concentrates it. It's then delivered to you through plastic tubing. The tubing is long enough so that you can move around the house. When you're using the concentrator, it must be kept somewhere that has a good supply of fresh air. Don't keep it in a confined space, like a closet. You may be set up on a concentrator if you need oxygen all the time or while you're sleeping.
- **Liquid oxygen.** This results when oxygen gas is cooled to a very low temperature. It's kept in special containers that stay at this low temperature. When you use liquid oxygen, it's warmed and becomes gas before reaching the cannula. Most tanks come with a portable unit that you can carry or pull on a cart. Some of these weigh only a few pounds (kilograms). Liquid oxygen units are easy to carry around. If you need oxygen all the time or during activity, this kind of unit can help you stay active.

## Oxygen is prescribed just for you

Your healthcare provider will prescribe oxygen based on your needs. Here are a few things you should know:

- A therapist from the medical equipment company will explain when to use oxygen and what type to use. You'll be taught how to use and maintain your oxygen equipment.
- You must use the exact rate of oxygen prescribed for each activity. Don't increase or decrease the amount on your own. Ask your healthcare provider first.
- Supplemental oxygen is a medicine. It's not addictive. It causes no side effects when used as directed.

## Chronic Lung Disease: Tips for Quitting Smoking

Cigarette smoke damages lung tissue and irritates airways. This makes breathing harder. Smoking also damages tiny hairs (cilia) in the airways. Then the cilia can't do their job of clearing mucus, dirt, and germs from the lungs. It's never too late to quit smoking. Your health will start to improve on the same day you put out your last cigarette.



### You don't have to quit alone

You may be more likely to quit for good if you seek support from others.

- Talk with your healthcare provider about your plans to quit. Ask about medicines that can help. Some contain nicotine and some don't. Some you can get by prescription. You can buy others over-the-counter. These medicines help control the desire to use tobacco. And they control symptoms that occur when people try to quit. Others slowly reduce nicotine levels in the body. Your provider can tell you about your choices such as:
  - Oral medicines such as bupropion or varenicline
  - Nicotine replacement therapy such as gum, lozenge, a patch, inhaler, or nasal spray
- Join a support group or get advice from an ex-smoker.
- Ask other smokers in your household to quit with you.

### Tips for quitting smoking

There isn't one right way to stop smoking. Everyone quits in their own way. Some of these tips may help:

- Make a list of reasons you want to quit. Keep this list and read it often.
- Pick a date to quit smoking. Then stick to it.

- List the things that make you want to smoke. Think of ways to stay away from these triggers.
- Set goals for yourself. Try going for a week without smoking. Reward yourself when you meet your goals.
- If you don't quit the first time, keep trying! Many people have to try more than once before they stop smoking for good.

### **For more information**

- [smokefree.gov/talk-to-an-expert](https://smokefree.gov/talk-to-an-expert)
- National Cancer Institute Smoking Quitline: 877-44U-QUIT (877-448-7848)

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.