

## Oxygen Therapy for Cluster Headache

As long ago as 1981, Dr Lee Kudrow's study of oxygen therapy showed that inhaling high flow oxygen for about 15 to 20 minutes or so could abort a cluster headache attack. Subsequent studies confirm his findings. The mechanism seems to be that the hypothalamus – a small organ at the base of the brain – sends out a false message that the brain is short of oxygen [evidenced by yawning] and the blood vessels immediately start expanding in the search for O<sub>2</sub>; this puts enormous pressure on the nerves inside the skull, causing the dreadful pain of CH. So inhaling high flow oxygen reverses that process and the attack ends. Oxygen works for about 80% of sufferers.

There are two types of oxygen therapy: standard high flow oxygen [Short Burst Oxygen Therapy] and demand valve oxygen.

In England and Wales, for your GP to prescribe high flow oxygen, you need to download from the OUCH website Downloads section the Home Oxygen Order Form (HOOF). This is part completed ready for a cluster headache sufferer. But before ordering oxygen for you, the GP also needs to complete the following forms, available at the surgery:

- Home Oxygen Consent Form (HOC)
- Individual Home Oxygen Risk Management Form (IHORM)

Your GP needs to complete the HOOF form online via the oxygen company's online portal, entering your details and the surgery details, as well as the flow rate, cylinder type and oxygen mask as given on the HOOF form in our downloads section.

**Note:** if the GP has not signed the HOOF form to say he has completed the risk management form, the oxygen supply company will reject the HOOF form.

**Note:** if you smoke, or anyone in your house smokes, then oxygen will not be supplied.

Once the HOOF is accepted and received, the oxygen supplier then contacts you direct to arrange delivery. The engineer delivering it will show you how to use it and supply you with masks, as well as a spare cylinder upon request.

Some GPs may say they can't prescribe the oxygen and that it has to be prescribed by a secondary clinician [i.e., a consultant]. This is not so, as it is specifically laid down in the Home Oxygen Assessment Service (HOAS) specification that GPs can prescribe oxygen for CH sufferers for pain relief. There is a copy of the HOAS specification in every doctor's surgery.

**Demand valve.** There is also a new type of oxygen therapy, called ultra high flow oxygen, delivered via a device known as a demand valve, similar to the device used for entinox in childbirth and for severe pain. The demand valve HOOF form for that is also available in the downloads section of the website and is also part completed for a CH sufferer. Again, the HOC and the IHORM forms have to be completed by the GP and indicated on the HOOF form and again, the GP will need to submit the HOOF form via the online portal.

**Note:** at present demand valve oxygen therapy is only available in England and Wales. Call our advice line to check if it is available in your area of England.

**Scotland and Northern Ireland.** In Scotland and Northern Ireland, oxygen can only be prescribed by a secondary clinician, i.e. a consultant, so it is more important than ever that you seek a referral to a headache specialist.