

Interim BASH Guidelines for Oxygen in Cluster Headache

From 1st February 2006, new regulations for home oxygen prescribing delivery will be applied by the Department of Health. In the past, oxygen was available on prescription for collection from pharmacies. Now, the prescribing doctor sends a Home Oxygen Order Form to the oxygen supplier with the contract for that region. The supplier then delivers the oxygen cylinders directly to the patient.

1. Although the results from placebo-controlled trials are awaited, oxygen provides an effective and safe treatment for cluster headache. The mechanism of its action is unknown.
2. 100% oxygen is required for a therapeutic effect. Ordering physicians should specify:
 - i) A delivery of 10-15 litres per minute, a non-rebreathable mask and short burst delivery to provide 100% oxygen.
 - ii) A static 1,360L cylinder. This will provide up to 200 minutes supply depending on the cylinder pressure supplied.
 - iii) For portable use, an ambulatory 460L cylinder can be ordered providing up to 40 minutes supply.
3. Oxygen should inhaled for 10 to 20 minutes depending on the clinical response. Patients should be in a sitting position, leaning forward.
4. Oxygen therapy should not be used in patients who have chronic pulmonary obstructive disease. For other co-existing pulmonary conditions where 100% oxygen may be harmful, advice should be taken from a respiratory physician.
5. Patients should be made aware of the dangers of continuing to smoke in the presence of oxygen therapy. The majority of cluster patients are smokers at presentation and smoking cessation intervention should be given, although this will not affect the natural history of the disease.
6. Patients should be reassessed at least annually. Prophylactic medication should be considered for patients who are frequent users of oxygen.