



# CareTalk

A Publication of Hope Hospice, Inc.

## Home Oxygen Safety

**M**edical oxygen is prescribed by a doctor at a specific level to treat breathing issues from various disorders, and this therapy can greatly improve one's quality of life. However, oxygen greatly increases fire risk, so you must exercise great caution when this therapy is used in the home.

Oxygen by itself is not a flammable gas and it will not explode, but it reacts violently with combustible materials; if something catches fire, oxygen makes it burn much faster. Using medical oxygen in the home increases the amount of oxygen in all textiles, upholstery, clothing, and hair, making it easy for a house fire to start and spread.

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If you care for someone who uses medical oxygen, put these safety tips into practice:

- No one who smokes should ever be near an oxygen container. There is no safe way to smoke in a home where medical oxygen is being used.
- Stay at least 15 feet away from any open flame. This applies not only in the home, but also in public places like a restaurant that may have features such as

(See "Oxygen" on page 3)



## What Makes Seniors Prone to Heatstroke?

**C**alifornia's mild weather year-round is one reason that area is such a desirable place to live. But we do have heat waves, especially inland, and these times require caution. Individuals over age 65 are particularly susceptible to heat-related illness, and the symptoms can present rapidly. Let's review some of the reasons why hot days are extra concerning to elderly people.

1. As we age, the body loses some of its ability to sense thirst. But not feeling thirsty doesn't mean that you're properly hydrated.
2. Some medications have a diuretic effect, causing the person to urinate more frequently. In turn, the body can become dehydrated if fluids are not replenished. Be alert if the person in your care is on prescriptions for Type 2 diabetes, laxatives for constipation, and certain blood pressure medicines, as these are drugs that carry a risk of dehydration.
3. Exposure to severe heat, especially combined with being dehydrated, can cause dizziness when standing up too fast. For an elderly person who already has balance issues, this scenario creates a high fall risk.
4. Many seniors are on living on fixed incomes and, thus, are hesitant to use electricity-hogging air conditioning, even on the hottest days.
5. Seniors who are embarrassed about incontinence issues may avoid



(See "Heat safety" on page 2)



Hope Hospice, Inc.  
6377 Clark Ave., Suite 100  
Dublin, CA 94568-3024  
(925) 829-8770  
[HopeHospice.com](http://HopeHospice.com)

## LEADERSHIP TEAM

Jennifer Hansen  
Chief Executive Officer

Satu Johal  
Chief Financial Officer

Jatinder Pal Singh Marwaha, MD, HMDC  
Medical Director

Epi DeLeon, MD  
Associate Medical Director

Kuljeet Multani, MD, HMDC  
Associate Medical Director

Kshitija Kari, MD  
Associate Medical Director

Arlene Baldwin  
Director of Grief Support Services

Gia Barsell  
Manager of Dementia Services

Maria Iglesias  
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Raul Perez, RN, BSN, PHN  
Chief of Patient Care Services

Kari Rayford, LVN, CHPLN  
Director of Outreach

Kendra Strey  
Director of Communications

Nikki Tildesley  
Manager of Volunteer Services

Elsei Ye-Arling, RN, BSN, CCM  
Director of Patient Care Services



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## Heat safety *(continued from page 1)*

drinking liquids to prevent accidents. They are much more likely to become dehydrated when the body is already losing fluid reserves to excess perspiration.

### Safety During a Heat Wave

Since elderly or frail individuals can be extra sensitive to hot weather, care providers should pay special attention to hydration and comfort.

- Water-dense foods such as melons are an easy way to give **extra fluids** beyond what a person consumes by drinking. Sugar-free Popsicles do the trick, too.
- Some people just don't like drinking plain water. You can **add flavor** by plopping in a few pieces of fruit or try flavored sparkling waters. Be careful to monitor the sugar content in juices and sports drinks; a 50:50 mix of water and juice is a better option. If serving iced tea, choose a decaffeinated version, since caffeine itself is a diuretic.
- A fan can only help so much. If the person's home doesn't have air-conditioning, or if the expense is a concern, contact your local health services department to locate a **cooling center** (libraries and senior centers are common ones). Pack up activities, snacks, and supplies and plan to spend most of the day in the relief of the cooling center.
- During extreme heat, plan **meals that don't require stovetop or oven cooking** so that you avoid further raising the temperature in the home.
- If an elderly person or couple lives alone, arrange **twice-daily check-ins**. Create a schedule with friends, neighbors, and other family so that the responsibility doesn't fall on one individual.
- Embrace your inner child—a low-profile kiddie pool in the backyard can be just as enjoyable at age 80 as it was at 3. Set up a chair under a shady tree and everyone can enjoy a **cooling foot soak**. ➤

### KNOW THE SIGNS OF HEATSTROKE

It's important to know the signs of heat-related illness, because a person can die if symptoms are not resolved. **Heat exhaustion** is evidenced by heavy sweating, muscle cramps, nausea and/or vomiting, and dizziness and/or fainting. For someone with these symptoms, take urgent action to lower his body temperature: move into an air-conditioned room and place ice packs at the back of the neck and under arm pits. If left untreated, heat exhaustion can quickly turn into the more severe **heatstroke**, which can be fatal. If a person exhibits signs of heatstroke such as the following, call 9-1-1. ➤



confusion,  
headache,  
dizziness



rapid, strong pulse



hot, red skin  
and sweating  
has stopped



unconscious,  
unresponsive

## Three Ways to Give That AC System a Break

Running the air-conditioning all day has a serious impact the electricity bill. Plus, with California's power crisis calling for conservation, it's important to reduce our use as much as possible during a heat wave. Here are a few easy things you can do to keep the house cool.

- 1 Get up early and open the windows to let in cool morning air. During a major heat wave, you may only have the pre-dawn hours through 8 a.m. to capitalize on this before it's time to implement Tip No. 2.
- 2 Close all windows and lower shades completely as soon as the outdoor air temperature is warmer than that of the indoors. Keep lights off as much as possible; traditional incandescent bulbs in particular emit a lot of heat. Yes, it's gloomy like this, but it's a temporary solution.
- 3 Avoid using major appliances until late at night. Appliances not only emit heat, they also use up large quantities of energy that is better spent on mid-day air-conditioning. Plus, you're doing your part to help the regional power grid stay operational during times of high demand. ➔

### Oxygen (continued from page 1)

an open-kitchen layout, candles at the table, and outdoor firepits.

- Keep medical oxygen away from anything with an electric motor, such as toys, electric baseboard or space heaters, hairdryers and other handheld tools, and electric blankets. Though rare, it's possible that any of these items can malfunction and cause a spark that would ignite the oxygen.
- Never use aerosol sprays containing combustible materials near the oxygen.
- Ensure the home has working smoke detectors. Plan and practice a fire-escape plan.
- Do not use petroleum- or oil-based lotions or lip care, as these can react violently with an oxygen-fueled fire.
- The kitchen is a major hazard area for an individual using oxygen. Microwave cooking is generally okay, if you follow the manufacturer's instructions (i.e.,



metal in the microwave = sparks and fire). Dangerous activity includes cooking with grease or oil, which easily splatters.

- Never use or store oxygen in a confined space like a closet.

Fire danger is not the only concern with oxygen therapy at home. Tripping on tubing is another risk, especially for elderly persons who may be unsteady on their feet and/or have diminished muscle strength to help correct a stumble. Awareness of the tubing's presence is the main remedy. Taping the tube to the backside of the user's shirt may help preserve freedom of movement. ➔

## QUICK QUIZ

Read the issue and answer True or False to the questions below.

1. Oxygen is not a flammable gas.  
True or False
2. One reason a person may become dehydrated is because his or her medication has a diuretic effect.  
True or False
3. Heat exhaustion is more severe than heatstroke.  
True or False
4. Store extra medical oxygen tanks in a dark closet to prevent sun exposure.  
True or False
5. Using medical oxygen in the home increases the amount of oxygen in all fabrics, making it easy for a house fire to start and spread.  
True or False
6. On hot days, wait until the evening to use major appliances.  
True or False
7. When a person is showing symptoms of a heat-related illness, placing ice packs behind the neck will help lower the body temperature.  
True or False
8. If someone in the home is on oxygen therapy, he can smoke a cigarette as long as he remains outdoors.  
True or False
9. Caffeine is a diuretic.  
True or False
10. As a person ages, the body will sense thirst much more easily.  
True or False

Find the quiz answers at the bottom of page 4.



## Photo Flip-Books Help Engage in Late-Stage Dementia

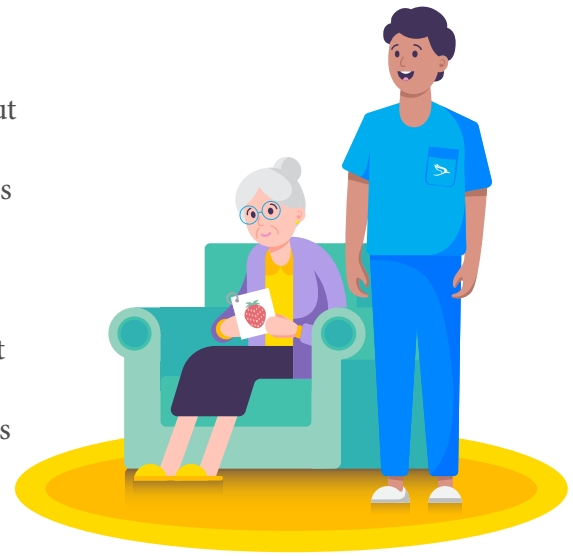
A person living with dementia will experience brain changes as the underlying disease progresses. It's common to observe a decline in verbal communication ability, as well as impaired cognition; the brain is struggling to make connections. Because of this, a person with dementia usually responds better to visuals rather than words alone. When a care partner is trying to explain what's happening to the person, such as it's time for bathing or eating, using hand motions along with simplified phrases may help the task go more smoothly.

Picture books are another way to engage and entertain a person living with dementia who struggles with comprehension and verbal expression.

Large coffee table books are nice, but they can be expensive and heavy. Children's books are just that, books made for children, so they aren't always appropriate for adults.

Hope Hospice has used our volunteer team to create lightweight flip books to accomplish the same goal—plus, we customize the photos to our patients' topics of interest. Themes can be gardening, dogs, babies, airplanes, etc.

- Gather images on theme from magazines, postcards, and other printed materials.
- Cut the pictures to the size of an index card or cardstock, and glue one image on each side of 10–15 cards.



- Laminate each card and trim so that they are uniform.
- Punch a hole in the top left corner of the laminated cards and install a metal ring. (Office supply stores sell these, called “loose leaf book rings.”)



## Senior-Care Education

Hope Hospice is committed to helping our community offer the best care to seniors. Our experts are available to present complimentary educational seminars to professionals in the medical field and the general public. If you oversee a team of care providers who would benefit from a refresher on such topics as hospice, best practices in dementia care, or any of the other subjects listed at right, please connect today to discuss your needs. We are available to present in-person at your facility or over Zoom teleconference. ➔

Hope Hospice is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

### Available Topics

- Agitation/terminal restlessness
- Advance healthcare directives
- Body mechanics
- Dementia care
- Fall prevention
- Hospice education
- Medication administration
- MRSA/C-Diff
- Nutrition for seniors
- Pain in the elderly
- Respiratory concerns
- Skin care of the elderly

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please connect with Hope Hospice Director of Outreach, Kari Rayford, LVN, at [karir@hopehospice.com](mailto:karir@hopehospice.com) or (925) 829-8770 to discuss your team's needs.