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Nasal Cannula

Purpose

The purpose of a nasal cannula is to direct low-flow prescribed oxygen from an oxygen source to your nasal passages. Nasal cannulas are only supplied for individuals that are being treated with prescribed oxygen. The oxygen being supplied to you is in conjunction with the prescription obtained from your physician.

Types

Nasal cannulas come in two types: reservoir and non-reservoir. This information sheet will discuss the non-reservoir type. The non-reservoir type of nasal cannula is the most commonly used nasal cannula in the home. A nasal cannula is a flexible tube that has two prongs that are inserted into the nose for the delivery of oxygen.

When your oxygen is flowing, the nasal cannula is delivering oxygen into your nasal cavity. When you take a breath, the oxygen is inhaled into your lungs. Since the oxygen is flowing into your nasal cavity, which is connected to your oral cavity, the oxygen supplied by the nasal cannula is effective even if you normally breathe through your mouth.

In some cases a humidifier is added to an oxygen delivery system in order to moisten the dry oxygen gas. Humidifiers are usually only provided for higher oxygen flows. If you are using a humidifier, please follow the instructions on the Oxygen Humidifier Patient Education Sheet.

All nasal cannulas are supplied as part of an oxygen treatment plan from your physician. Since the oxygen travels through the nasal cannula and is inserted into your nostrils, make sure you replace the nasal cannula when it appears visibly soiled.

Use

The most important part of using a nasal cannula is to understand your oxygen prescription and use the oxygen only as prescribed by your physician. Do not deviate from your prescription without first contacting your physician and then contacting your oxygen supplier. Too much oxygen can be harmful.

Nasal passages start at the nostrils and curve downward until they merge with the oral cavity, and then extend down through the voice box and into the lungs. Just like your nasal passages, the nasal cannula should be inserted into your nostrils with the curved prongs pointing downward. Once the prongs are placed in your nostrils, the tubing is placed over your ears and then routed back under your chin. The adjustment sleeve on the cannula can be adjusted upward to secure the fit.

If approved by your concentrator manufacturer, the length of your nasal cannula can be extended by the addition of connection tubing. It is not recommended to have more than 50 feet of crush-free oxygen tubing.

Use (Continued)

If your nostrils become irritated, use only *water-based* lubricants. DO NOT use any petroleum products like Vaseline® around any oxygen source. If your ears become sore or irritated, contact your oxygen supplier for some ear cushions.

Because oxygen conserving devices need to be able to determine when you take a breath, people who breathe through their mouth may not be able to effectively trigger the flow of oxygen. Individuals using oxygen conserving devices with nasal cannulas should be tested to make sure they can initiate the flow of oxygen.

Safety

The safe use of a nasal cannula requires it to be used as instructed, which includes the following safety precautions:

- Ensure that you follow all the oxygen use and safety precautions provided to you by your oxygen supplier.
- Ensure that oxygen delivery tubing is routed and secured so that it does not become entangled and/or damaged.
- Do not use any oxygen device, while smoking.
- Do not use petroleum products.

Maintenance

Nasal cannulas need to be kept clean. Replace your nasal cannula when it appears visibly soiled. Your oxygen extension tubing should be replaced when visibly soiled or at least every three months.

Always make sure you have an alternate nasal cannula and extension tubing in case yours needs to be replaced. If you use your alternate nasal cannula or extension tubing, call your oxygen supplier for new supplies.