



## High Flow Oxygen Therapy

When you or a loved one is in the hospital with breathing difficulties, the medical team may use a treatment called High Flow Oxygen Therapy (often called High Flow Nasal Cannula). Seeing new medical equipment can be overwhelming, but this therapy is simply a safe, comfortable, and highly effective way to help patients breathe easier and get the oxygen their body needs to heal.

### What is high flow oxygen therapy?

Normally, when someone needs a little extra oxygen in the hospital, they receive it through standard plastic prongs that sit just inside the nose (a standard nasal cannula).

However, when a patient is working very hard to breathe or needs a much larger amount of oxygen, standard prongs aren't enough. High Flow Oxygen Therapy is an advanced system that delivers a much higher flow of oxygen and air. It is delivered through special, slightly larger soft silicone prongs that sit comfortably in the nose.

### How does it work?

There are many features that make High Flow Therapy so effective:

**High Flow (Speed):** The system delivers a fast, steady stream of air and oxygen. This matches the patient's own breathing speed, meaning they don't have to struggle to pull air into their lungs. The steady flow also creates a gentle "cushion" of pressure in the lungs, which helps keep the airways open and makes every breath feel easier and less exhausting.

**Precise Oxygen:** The medical team can dial in the exact amount of oxygen the patient needs, anywhere from normal room air (21%) all the way up to 100% pure oxygen.

**Warmth and Moisture (Humidification):** If you were to breathe in fast, dry air for a long time, your nose and throat would become very dry, cold, and sore. To prevent this, the High Flow machine warms the air to normal body temperature and adds moisture (humidity) before it reaches the patient. This makes the treatment incredibly comfortable and helps the lungs easily clear out any mucus.

## Why is this therapy needed?

High Flow Oxygen Therapy is used to treat a variety of conditions that make breathing difficult. The most common reasons include:

- Severe infections like pneumonia
- Flare-ups of chronic lung diseases like COPD or asthma.
- Heart conditions that cause fluid to build up in the lungs.
- Recovery after major surgery.

Often, doctors use High Flow Therapy to help patients avoid needing more invasive breathing support, such as a breathing tube or a ventilator.

## What does it feel like?

- **Warm and Breezy:** At first, the rush of air might feel strange, like sticking your head out the window of a moving car, but it is warm and very moist. Most patients get used to the sensation within a few minutes.
- **Relief:** Patients usually feel immediate relief. Their breathing slows down to a normal pace, their heart rate settles, and they feel much less exhausted.
- **Noise:** The machine itself makes a low, continuous humming and rushing sound due to the fast flow of air.

## What can patients do while on high flow?

One of the biggest advantages of High Flow Therapy is that it is much less restrictive than wearing a large, tight-fitting oxygen mask.

- **Talking:** Because the soft prongs sit just inside the nose, the mouth is completely free. Patients can usually talk clearly with their family and caregivers.
- **Eating and Drinking:** Unless the doctor has asked the patient not to eat for other medical reasons, patients on High Flow can drink water, eat meals, and take their oral medications comfortably.
- **Moving Around:** While the machine is plugged into the wall, patients can still sit up in a chair, shift positions in bed, and sometimes walk a few steps with the help of the nursing staff.

## Common questions

**How long will the patient need this therapy?** Every patient is different. Some only need it for a day or two, while others might need it for a week or more while their lungs heal. The medical team will constantly monitor their progress.

**How does the therapy end?** As the patient's lungs get stronger and the infection or illness improves, the respiratory therapist will slowly turn down the oxygen level and the flow speed. Once the patient is doing well on low settings, they will be switched to a standard, regular oxygen tube.

