

Oxygen and cluster headache

Oxygen has been shown to be useful in many patients with cluster headache to stop an attack.

As soon as you know an attack is starting turn the oxygen on to 15 litres per minute and then, after a few minutes, turn it down to around 6 to 8 litres per minute, sufficient to keep the reservoir bag inflated. If successful, an individual attack should be aborted within 15 minutes. If the attack is successfully stopped, you should stay on the oxygen for 5 minutes after the pain has gone to “mop up” the attack and prevent possible rebound, which some patients find is a problem.

If you do not find oxygen helpful, let the person who ordered the oxygen know so that the oxygen can be cancelled. If you find you fall asleep after an attack and leave the oxygen on, then a demand device is available which only supplies oxygen when you breathe in.

If you are a smoker, it is a good time to stop. Two out of every three fires where there is home oxygen are the results of the user smoking and one in four people where the fire is a result of smoking while using oxygen die from their injuries. Vaping is also a significant risk. In certain cases your doctor may be prepared to prescribe oxygen but only after all the risks have been assessed with you.

More information is available from OUCH (Organisation for the Understanding of Cluster Headache) at www.ouchuk.org. OUCH is a UK Charity whose aim is to raise awareness of cluster headache.

Exeter headache clinic 10/6/21