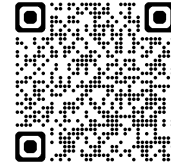


Carbon Dioxide Retention (Hypercapnia)

Information for people in our care and families from the Community Respiratory Specialist Team



Service hours: 9am–5pm
Phone: 0300 124 5909

What is carbon dioxide retention?

When we breathe in, our body takes in oxygen from the air to help it work.

Our body then makes carbon dioxide (CO₂) as a waste gas, which we breathe out. This is normal.

Sometimes, especially if someone has a lung condition like Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the body cannot get rid of this gas properly. The carbon dioxide builds up in the blood. This is called carbon dioxide retention or hypercapnia.

For some people with lung problems, breathing in too much extra oxygen can also make carbon dioxide levels go up.

If too much carbon dioxide builds up, it can make you sleepy, slow your breathing, and make you very unwell.

Signs to look out for

Symptoms of carbon dioxide retention include:

- Headaches in the morning.
- Feeling dizzy.
- Feeling confused or not thinking clearly.
- Feeling very sleepy or more tired than usual.
- Sweating more than usual.
- A red or flushed face.
- Hand flapping or shaking when holding your arms out.

What should you do?

If you notice these symptoms, get medical help as soon as possible.

This problem is more likely if:

- You use oxygen for a long time (for example, overnight or more than 30 minutes at a time).
- Your oxygen level has recently been increased.
- You are feeling more unwell than usual.

Important advice about oxygen

If you have oxygen at home:

- Always use it exactly as you have been told.
- Do not change the flow rate unless a healthcare professional tells you to.

Where to get help

- Call the Community Respiratory Specialist Team (9am–5pm, Monday–Friday).
- Outside these hours, call 111.
- In an emergency, call 999.

Other formats

We want you and the people who help you to understand what we send. If you need help with this letter or leaflet, please tell us.



You can phone us on 0300 124 5909.

Please scan the QR code to listen to an audio version of this statement.