

Oxygen Therapy

● SKILL SNAPSHOT

Purpose

- Treats or prevents hypoxemia by delivering the lowest effective supplemental oxygen dose to a prescribed target.

When to use

- Documented or suspected hypoxemia, acute illness, procedural support, or chronic oxygen need according to order/protocol.

Supplies needed

- Prescribed oxygen device; source/flowmeter; pulse oximeter; humidification if indicated; skin protection; emergency airway equipment.

● PREP + PATIENT SETUP

- Verify order/device/flow or FiO2 and target SpO2; assess respiratory status, diagnosis, and hypercapnia risk.
- Check oxygen source, cylinder supply, tubing, connections, and device function.

● VAULT TIP

- Use the lowest effective oxygen dose that meets the ordered target while the underlying problem is treated.

● STEP-BY-STEP

1. Hand hygiene; identify patient; position to optimize ventilation and perform baseline respiratory assessment.
2. Select the prescribed device based on required concentration, breathing pattern, comfort, and clinical condition.
3. Connect device and set exact flow/FiO2 before application; follow minimum safe flows for masks.
4. Apply device correctly and verify oxygen is flowing. Ensure tubing is uninked and not creating pressure or trip hazards.
5. Reassess SpO2, RR/depth, work of breathing, breath sounds, color, mentation, HR, and comfort after initiation.
6. Titrate only under order/protocol to the target range. Avoid both hypoxemia and unnecessary hyperoxia.
7. For patients at risk of hypercapnic respiratory failure, use the specifically prescribed target and monitor closely; never withhold oxygen from severe hypoxemia.
8. Inspect nares, ears, cheeks, and mask pressure areas; provide oral/nasal care and oxygen-compatible skin protection.
9. Use humidification when prescribed/indicated for device, flow, duration, or secretion comfort.
10. Encourage cough, deep breathing, mobility, positioning, and incentive spirometry when appropriate.
11. If target is not reached or distress worsens, assess source/device and patient, escalate support, and notify rapid response/provider as indicated.
12. Maintain fire safety: no smoking/open flame, secure cylinders upright, keep away from sparks/heat, and avoid petroleum products.

● SAFETY REMINDERS

- Oxygen is a medication and supports combustion.
- Assess the patient, not only the SpO2 number.
- Do not use petroleum products.
- Apnea/inadequate ventilation requires ventilatory support, not oxygen alone.

● COMMON MISTAKES

- Wrong device or unsafe low mask flow.
- Changing settings without order/protocol.
- Ignoring skin pressure injury.
- Delaying escalation despite distress.

● DOCUMENTATION

- Device, flow/FiO2, target range.
- Pre/post respiratory assessment and SpO2.
- Titration and patient response.
- Skin/humidification/safety teaching.
- Escalation and notifications.