Oxygen safety: A holiday reminder

Oxygen therapy can help people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) feel better. That makes it easier to be active and enjoy the holidays.

Oxygen is a safe treatment, but it does pose a fire risk. Oxygen by itself doesn’t burn. It can make other things burn quickly, though, if a fire starts.

Here are five safety reminders:

1. **Don’t allow smoking around oxygen.** A “No smoking” sign on the door can help remind holiday guests.

2. **Enjoy fireplaces and candles from a distance.** Keep oxygen at least 6 feet away from any open flame.

3. **Cook with caution.** Keep oxygen away while cooking with gas. Keep oxygen away from other stovetops and ovens too.

4. **Be careful with flammable liquids.** This includes alcohol-based hand sanitizers. They can help ward off cold and flu germs this time of year. Be sure your hands are very dry near oxygen.

   Don’t use scented sprays or other aerosols (like hair spray) while oxygen is on. Also be careful when using petroleum products.

5. **Get a fire extinguisher.** Be sure to check the expiration date. You may never need it, but it’s best to be prepared.

Health care doesn’t take a holiday

It can be easy to overlook medications, health checks, and doctor’s appointments at this time of year. People should do their best to stay on track — and reach out to their care manager or doctor if they have any questions or need help.

How to make it through the holidays

The holidays can be stressful for the healthiest people. They can prove to be an even tougher time for people with a chronic illness.

People should keep in mind that they can opt out of any holiday events they don’t feel up to attending. It’s OK to say no. When they do take part, they can:

• Let someone else take on hosting duties.
• Plan in advance how they want to spend their time — and with whom.
• Take breaks from the social scene if they feel themselves running low on energy.
• Feeling tired? It’s OK to take a nap.
• Avoid alcohol. It can worsen bad moods or feelings.
• Take care of themselves by eating balanced meals.
• Give themselves permission to express their emotions. People shouldn’t try to force a happy face if they’re really feeling down.

• Try taking a walk when the sun’s out. Gray days can bring on seasonal affective disorder — a type of depression. Getting out in the sun can brighten their mood.
• Get plenty of rest so they have the energy for favorite events.

Keeping in touch

In the bustle of the holidays, people shouldn’t let their health fall by the wayside. Their primary care provider and care manager can answer their questions and point them to tools that make managing their health easier. Those include mobile apps to track blood pressure, cholesterol, medications, daily activity or calories. If people feel stressed or overwhelmed by their health, they should reach out. They’re not alone.

Sources: Alzheimer’s Association (www.alz.org); American Cancer Society (www.cancer.org); National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org)

Get the shot, not the flu

Just about everyone who’s 6 months of age or older needs a flu shot. That’s especially true for people with a chronic illness.

The best time to get a shot is before the flu starts spreading in your community. That’s hard to predict. It’s probably best to get the shot as soon as it’s available in your area.

Remember: You can’t get the flu from a shot. It’s among the best ways to avoid getting the flu.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

Caregivers: Seek the help you deserve

If you are a caregiver, ask your loved one’s care manager about their needed services as well as services you might need as a caregiver. For example, you may feel overwhelmed, sad or burned out. The care manager can provide information and referrals for support.