

## Monitoring Oxygen Levels at Home

### What is a Pulse Oximeter?

A Pulse Oximeter is a small device that, when placed on your finger, will show numbers indicating your heart rate and the level of oxygen in your blood.

### Why should I test my oxygen level?

When patients have underlying health conditions, such as asthma, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), it's recommended that they monitor their pulse oxygen levels at home.

Checking your oxygen levels at home can provide reassurance as symptoms of shortness of breath can change during your illness and warn of an oncoming exacerbation. Monitoring drops in your oxygen levels can help you recognize when to reach out to your healthcare provider for assistance or care.

A drop in oxygen levels can be an early warning sign before symptoms develop or get worse.

### How to Use a Pulse Oximeter?

- Apply the device to your index or middle finger, ensuring it fits securely, with the screen facing up.
- Take readings indoors while sitting at rest, limiting your movements and breathing at a comfortable level.
- If your hands are cold, warm them prior to testing\* and remove all nail polish from the testing finger.
- Observe readings for 30-60 seconds before recording your most common reading.
- When reading your levels on an oximeter:
  - **PR or HR** is your pulse rate or heart rate.
  - **SpO<sub>2</sub>** is your **blood oxygen level**.
- Measure and record readings two to three times per day.



\* Note: Some medical conditions, such as Raynaud's, can make it difficult to obtain a pulse oximetry reading.

See the next page for more information.

## What do I do if my level drops?

If your number drops, check with your healthcare provider.

We want most patients with COPD to maintain an oxygen **level of 92% or higher**.

Patients who have an underlying lung disease may already have a lower oxygen level and use home oxygen. It's also important for them to monitor their levels at home and report any drops from their normal levels.

## What about other symptoms?

The key to taking care of yourself at home with COPD is to monitor all your symptoms. If you use a pulse oximeter, do not rely on it as the only measure of your condition.

Please contact your healthcare provider if you are experiencing worsening symptoms.

More than usual coughing, wheezing, or shortness of breath, changes in the color, thickness, or amount of mucus you are producing, feeling more tired or fatigued, experiencing more difficulty sleeping, or swelling can often be signs that an exacerbation may be starting regardless of your oxygen level.

## Things to remember

- It's possible to get false readings from an oximeter.
- **Things like dark nail polish, false nails, or cold hands can throw off a reading.**
- It's important to track your levels and not to react to a single reading.

## Where can I find a Pulse Oximeter?

If you don't have a home pulse oximeter and would like to begin monitoring, please see the options below:

- You can obtain a pulse oximeter at your local pharmacy or online at Amazon.com; prices vary and can range from \$20-\$40.
- If you are **unable to afford** one but are interested in learning more, email the address below for more information: [cm-careteam@brownhealth.org](mailto:cm-careteam@brownhealth.org)