

CHRONIC LACK OF OXYGEN IN THE BLOOD

Your doctor may have said you have “chronic respiratory failure” and therefore you need oxygen therapy at home. Chronic respiratory failure is a permanent lack of oxygen in the blood.

A chronic lack of oxygen in the blood may cause difficulties in the body’s function, and may show up in several ways:

- 1. More rapid onset of fatigue, especially during physical activity.**
- 2. Problems with memory and concentration; sleep disorders.**
- 3. Swelling (edema) of the legs.**
- 4. A bluish tinge (cyanosis) of the fingertips, earlobes or lips.**
- 5. Onset and/or aggravation of heart disease.**

HOW TO TELL IF YOU HAVE A CHRONIC LACK OF OXYGEN IN THE BLOOD

Your doctor examines you and decides to measure the amount of oxygen in your blood using one of these tests:

OXIMETRY

A pulse oximeter is a device with a sensor that attaches to the finger or ear to estimate the amount of oxygen in the blood, or “oxygen saturation (SpO₂).” This test, which is quick and painless, can tell whether your oxygen levels are too low (SpO₂ less than 90%). If so, a more precise arterial blood gas test is performed.

ARTERIAL BLOOD GAS

A small amount of blood is taken from a blood vessel (usually an artery in the wrist). This test can accurately measure the amount of oxygen (or PaO₂) and carbon dioxide (or PaCO₂) in the blood. It can confirm the need for oxygen therapy.

If you have chronic lack of oxygen in the blood, your doctor may prescribe a long-term oxygen therapy at home. This treatment is designed to maintain your blood oxygen at the level required for your organs to function properly.