



Situational Safety: Oxygen Use in the Home

Oxygen. We can't live without it. People with compromised heart and/or lung function suffer from diminished ability to use oxygen and often require supplemental oxygen. But, patients who receive oxygen from a cylinder may be at an increased risk of falling.

Why are patients on oxygen at higher risk for a fall?

The answers may surprise you. As with all prescribed drugs, the amount of oxygen a patient needs is determined by a physician. Even so, side effects do occur because of too much or too little oxygen.¹ Reduced oxygen flow for patients with breathing ailments can result in light-headedness and increase the risk for falls.

Oxygen tubing also presents a daily falling risk for many patients. Companies provide miles of clear plastic tubing with oxygen cylinders to allow the patient to walk throughout their house while staying connected to the main oxygen unit. Like a garden hose, the coil of tubing arrives and remains neat for only a short time, until the patient begins to walk throughout the house. Soon, the plastic tubing resembles a plate of spaghetti.

One in three patients over 65 years old fall each year.² A fall is of constant concern to a warfarin patient. Clear plastic tubing can easily become tangled around patients' feet. To reduce the risk of falling, patients should avoid rushing and always make sure all plastic tubing is cleared from walking paths and remains behind them. Avoiding a fall related to oxygen tubing requires small lifestyle changes, such as letting the phone ring and using an answering machine or asking the person at the door to wait until you arrive to open it safely. Stable warfarin monitoring and management can reduce complications from falling and improve patient safety.³ Patients should report all falls to their doctor.

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- 1 (2007). Retrieved April 22, 2008, from Department of Respiratory Therapy, Ohio State University Medical Center Web site: <http://medicalcenter.osu.edu/pdfs/PatientEd/Materials/PDFDocs/dis-cond/respirat/ox-sf-rg.pdf>
- 2 Garwood, C. (2008, April). Use of anticoagulation in elderly patients with atrial fibrillation who are at risk of falling. *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, (42)
- 3 Bristol-Myers Squibb Company. (2007). *Medication Guide for Coumadin Tablets and Coumadin for Injection* [Package Insert]. Princeton, NJ: Bristol-Myers Squibb Company.

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