Urgent Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy

Information for patients and families

Read this booklet to learn:

• what hyperbaric oxygen therapy is
• what it helps treat
• what happens after your therapy
• who to call if you have any questions
You have had hyperbaric oxygen therapy. You needed this treatment quickly, so your health care provider referred you to the Toronto General Hospital.

This booklet gives you more details about hyperbaric oxygen therapy and will help answer some questions you may have.

**What is hyperbaric oxygen therapy?**

During hyperbaric oxygen therapy, you breathe 100% or pure oxygen in a room with higher atmospheric (air) pressure. This increased pressure helps to push more oxygen into your tissues. Getting more oxygen into your body can help improve certain medical conditions.

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy was developed to treat victims of diving accidents. We now use it for other medical and surgical problems.

**Why did I need to have this therapy?**

Hyperbaric oxygen therapy can be used to help treat many medical problems. If we gave you hyperbaric oxygen therapy quickly, you probably had:

- **decompression illness**
  - This is also called the **bends**. It happens when scuba divers, pilots or tunnel workers change pressure too quickly. This doesn’t allow enough time for the body to remove gasses, such as nitrogen from your body.

- **a cerebral arterial gas embolism**
  - gas bubbles blocking blood and oxygen from traveling to your brain

- **carbon monoxide poisoning**
  - an odourless, colourless, and tasteless gas (made from improper burning of fossil fuels) that you have breathed into your body
gas gangrene
   • a bacterial infection that causes gas to form in dead tissue

delayed radiation injuries
   • Being around low doses of radiation for a long time can cause tissues in the body to not have enough oxygen.

osteomyelitis (refractory)
   • when your bone or bone marrow becomes infected

skin grafts, flaps or re-attached fingers that weren’t healing properly

compromised (ischemic) wounds that are not healing properly
   • wounds that do not receive enough oxygen

acute cerebral edema
   • too much fluid in your brain

cyanide poisoning
   • toxic amounts of cyanide in your body

serious burns

severe blood loss (also called anemia)

What is a hyperbaric chamber?
A hyperbaric chamber is a specially designed room or cylinder (large tube). It’s made of metal or acrylic and strong enough to handle increased pressure.

We use the chamber to give patients hyperbaric oxygen therapy. In the chamber, you sit in a seat with an oxygen mask over your head or lie down on a stretcher. A single treatment of hyperbaric oxygen can last from 2 to 3 hours.
If you needed the therapy quickly, you probably had your treatment in the large multiplace chamber. Our hyperbaric multiplace chamber holds several people at once, including a staff member trained to manage all of your needs.

We monitor (check) you during your whole treatment. To keep you comfortable and safe, the chamber has a patient entertainment system which provides television or movies during your treatment.

Because of the increased level of oxygen in the chamber, patients won’t be allowed to bring anything into the chamber without the staff’s permission.

**Who gives me the hyperbaric therapy?**

Certified Hyperbaric Technologists, registered respiratory therapists and registered nurses work in the hyperbaric department. They work as a team to give you the therapy.

The medical director for the department is a doctor from the Department of Anesthesia. Other doctors working in our department have been trained in hyperbaric medicine.

**What happens after my therapy?**

- The staff of the Hyperbaric Medicine department will give you 2 letters. Please give them to your family doctor when you go to your next appointment.
  
  If you go to Emergency for any reason, please take the letters with you (if you still have them).

- Your health care team will talk to you about the next steps in your health care plan.

- You may or may not have more hyperbaric oxygen therapy. If you need more oxygen therapy, we will schedule your appointments.

Talk to your health care team for more information about your health care plan. Remember to ask them any questions you may have.
Who should I call if I have questions?
If you have questions or concerns, please call the Hyperbaric Medicine Unit:
Phone: 416 340 4131

Toronto General Hospital
Clinical Services Building – Ground Floor (405)
200 Elizabeth St., Toronto ON M5G 2C4
Fax: 416 340 4481

Go to your local emergency department if you are feeling unwell or have an urgent health care issue.