

A Brief History of Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy

Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy has been around for over 300 years, with the first record of a pressurised chamber being used for medical treatment in England in 1662.

Henshaw's Domicilium

Clergyman and physician, Nathaniel Henshaw, designed a chamber which enabled hyperbaric and hypobaric environments using bellows to change the pressure. He called it the 'domicilium'.

During his time experimenting with the domicilium, Henshaw collected anecdotal evidence that suggested hyperbaric (high pressure) conditions helped people with acute conditions, whilst hypobaric (low pressure) environments worked for people with chronic conditions.

These claims have since been proven unreliable but Henshaw's invention was a vital part of the Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy development as it started conversations which led to the modern-day hyperbaric chambers.

Key Dates

Following Henshaw's domicilium there wasn't much interest in hyperbaric technology for the following 200 years. However in the 1800s a wave of experimentation, application and innovation took place and shaped Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy as we know it today. Here are some key milestones in the therapy's development:

- 1834: the first hyperbaric chamber was developed - it was found that patients experienced more generous blood flow to all internal organs, including the brain, and had overall feelings of relaxation and euphoria when in the hyperbaric environment.
- Late 1800s: hyperbaric practitioners could be found in every major city in Europe.
- 1860: Canada got the first North American hyperbaric chamber.
- Early 1900s: Dr Orville Cunningham used hyperbaric therapy to treat people afflicted by the Spanish Influenza epidemic.
- 1920s: the largest (at that time) hyperbaric chamber was built. Known as the 'Sanitarium' it was 64-feet in diameter and five stories tall, patients could stay inside it for up to two weeks.
- 1940s: hyperbaric chambers were used by the US military to treat deep-sea divers suffering from decompression sickness.
- 1950s: Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy was used during heart and lung surgery.
- 1960s: Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy was used for carbon monoxide poisoning.
- 1990s: Igor Gamow developed a portable hyperbaric chamber known as the Gamow Bag.

For more information about the history of Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy visit <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/66258#>



- 21st century: Hyperbaric chambers are now available around the globe, with the therapy being used to treat a huge variety of conditions such as strokes, autism, cancer, broken bones, sports injuries and MS to name a few.