

**Breathe deep. Heal faster.**

## Breath of Fresh Air: Hyperbaric Chamber Helps Healing, Recovery

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By Tyler Estep



*Richard W. King, the medical director at HyOx's Gwinnett location, walks past the hyperbaric chamber, a concentrated oxygen therapy program aimed at speeding recovery and healing.*

*Staff Photo: Jason Braverman*

LAWRENCEVILLE – Stan Linder goes diving for a few hours every morning, but the Dacula resident doesn't need scuba gear or a wetsuit, doesn't have to go to an exotic locale, or even nearby Lake Lanier.

Like several compatriots, Linder's medical history necessitates his daily trek to Lawrenceville and HyOx Medical Treatment Center. That's where he goes on his "dives" – two-hour treatments in one of the state's largest hyperbaric chambers, a concentrated oxygen therapy program aimed at speeding recovery and healing.

"This is my last hope of surviving from what I have," Linder says. "And it's absolutely fantastic. I'm starting to heal for the first time in a year. It's an amazing operation."

Sporting paper slippers over their shoes, Linder and his fellow patients enter the positively submarine-like chamber each morning. From there, they strap plastic bags reminiscent of old-time hair salons over their heads, breathing tubes pumping 100 percent oxygen into their systems.

Add some pressure, and the oxygen works on a deep cellular level, helping patients like Linder – a prostate cancer survivor – get better more successfully and more quickly.

As the state's largest, the 12-person chamber at HyOx's office on the campus of Gwinnett Medical Center is a unique but not a new concept. The Navy and other groups like it have used hyperbaric chambers for years, helping reverse the effects of decompression sickness (known commonly as "the bends").

Eventually, scientists found the process had more advanced medical implications.

"In the older days, they were using this for decompression chambers," says Dr. Richard W. King, the medical director at HyOx's Gwinnett location. "They found that they would heal faster when they were going through their recompression for the bends. It became a true specialty in treating people with high doses of oxygen."

Nowadays, hyperbaric treatments can help a number of conditions, including healing chronic wounds, speeding recovery of soft tissues and bone affected by radiation therapy and decreasing the risk of amputation in diabetic patients with lower extremity wounds.

King describes the whole process like a tsunami: "If the salt water rolls over the island and soaks it, it recedes. All of the water recedes, but the salt is still left there. The same thing happens with the oxygen."

"(Oxygen molecules) have now built up so much in your system, that they start to go out by osmosis into areas that are no longer getting good blood flow. Because of time and pressure, they get the oxygen that they need."

And that means healing where it might not otherwise be possible.

"I never thought I would experience it myself," Linder says. "It's kind of cool in there. It's hot going down, cold going up. You whittle the time away in there. You can read, you can watch TV. We have what we call our chatting society in there."

Once inside the huge chamber (a wall had to be torn down and a crane used to place it inside its new home), Linder and his friends "dive" to 45 feet below sea level. They're there for roughly two hours, typically every morning for several weeks before the supplementary treatment can take full effect.

As Linder said, patients pass the time by playing cards, watching movies and otherwise relaxing.

“At first they’re nervous, because they’ve never really seen anything like it, and you can’t really describe what’s going to happen inside,” King says, laughing. “You tell them it’s similar to being in an airplane and you feel your ears pop, but nobody believes that.

“But after the first one or two dives, it becomes old hat, and they just sit there and look at this other poor guy coming in for the first time,” he adds.

HyOx, based in Marietta, has been in the hyperbaric healing business for over a decade, with its Gwinnett location only in place for about two months. With two dives each morning, it’s yet to fill its full capacity but hopes to add more sessions each day as referrals pick up.

Linder, who staff have asked to be an advocate for the treatment, has seen “amazing” results so far.

“It’s a super deal,” he says. “I’m really glad it’s here, and I would recommend it to anybody for the better being of their health.”

## At A Glance

- Hyperbaric oxygen therapy can be used for a number of conditions
- Accelerates healing of chronic wounds
- Speeds recovery of soft tissues and bones affected by radiation
- Helps fight infection
- Reduces risk of complications prior to and following certain surgeries
- Decreases the risk of amputation in diabetic patients with lower extremity wounds
- Purges poisonous toxins such as carbon monoxide