

## How to use a peak flow meter

Your doctor, or other health professional such as a nurse, pharmacist or asthma educator, will show you how to use your peak flow meter correctly.

These are the key steps to using the meter:

- 1 Stand up.
- 2 Hold the peak flow meter level, so that the indicator faces upwards. Make sure the indicator is on zero or 'start'.
- 3 Take in as deep a breath as possible.
- 4 Place your lips tightly around the mouthpiece and blow as hard and fast as you can.
- 5 Check your score on the meter.
- 6 Repeat steps 1-5 two more times.
- 7 Record the highest score out of the three scores.

If your airways are narrower than usual, the peak flow meter will have a lower score than your 'best'. When your airways are wide open, the score will be at or close to your 'best'. What each person should score depends on their height, age and sex and so will vary from person to person.

*Always* use the **same peak flow meter** for each measurement as readings may vary between different peak flow meters. It is a good idea to take your own peak flow meter with you when you visit your doctor.

## Other times you may need to use a peak flow meter

A peak flow meter may be useful in monitoring any change in your asthma when:

- 1 You leave hospital.
- 2 You need to take your blue reliever puffer more often.
- 3 You are getting a cold or you don't feel as well as usual.
- 4 You have been near a known trigger.
- 5 Your medication is changed or new medication is started.
- 6 You are waking at night with your asthma (a sign of poorly controlled asthma).

This series on Asthma Topics for Consumers comprises eight separate titles:

- 1 Asthma and Allergy
- 2 Asthma and Lung Function Tests**
- 3 Asthma and Pain Relievers
- 4 Asthma and Air Pollution
- 5 Asthma and Complementary Therapies
- 6 Asthma and Infant Bedding
- 7 Asthma and Diet in Early Childhood
- 8 Asthma and Wheezing in the First Years of Life

To access these documents log on to: [www.NationalAsthma.org.au](http://www.NationalAsthma.org.au) or contact your local Asthma Foundation on **1800 645 130**.

## Further information

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist or contact your local Asthma Foundation on **1800 645 130**.

### Asthma Foundations of Australia

[www.asthmaaustralia.org.au](http://www.asthmaaustralia.org.au)

**National Asthma Council** [www.NationalAsthma.org.au](http://www.NationalAsthma.org.au)

**Asthma** [www.health.gov.au/pq/asthma](http://www.health.gov.au/pq/asthma)

**HealthInsite** [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

**Australasian Society for Clinical Immunology and Allergy** [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)

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### Disclaimer

Information in this brochure is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner.

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# Asthma and Lung Function Tests

Measuring asthma  
for better control



## Measuring asthma

Your doctor may ask you to have a **lung function test** (a breathing test) to help identify if you have asthma or work out how severe your asthma is. There are two breathing tests used for asthma – **spirometry** and **peak flow measurement**. Both measure how well your lungs are working and how much your asthma affects your breathing.

## Spirometry

Spirometry is the most accurate breathing test for asthma. An instrument called a **spirometer** is used.



Doctors use spirometry to:

- help identify if you have asthma
- help work out how severe your asthma is
- see if your asthma is getting worse
- see if your asthma is improving with treatment.

Spirometry accurately measures and records the amount of air breathed into and out of the lungs. The results show how narrow the airways in your lungs are. Spirometry also helps your doctor to decide what medications to prescribe for you or whether the dose of your current medication needs to be increased or decreased.

## What will I have to do for a spirometry test?

Before the spirometry test, your doctor should explain what it involves. She/he may send you to a hospital laboratory for the test, in which case the person doing the test should explain what will happen.

During a spirometry test you will be asked to:

- stand or sit up as straight as possible and blow into a mouthpiece which is part of the spirometer.
- make sure you have your mouth correctly over the mouthpiece, and then blow as hard as you can for six seconds, if possible.

The test will be repeated **three** times, if possible, in order to get the best result. You may also be asked to take some puffs from a blue reliever puffer. This will show whether medication has an effect on your airways and will help your doctor to assess the correct dose of your medication if necessary.

Once the results of the spirometry test are ready, your doctor should explain these to you.

Most adults, and many children over 7 years of age, can perform spirometry and produce reliable results.

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## Spirometry is strongly recommended for people with asthma.\*

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\* See your doctor regularly for review of your asthma.

## Peak flow

A **peak flow meter** gives an idea of how narrow your airways are by measuring the maximum (or peak) rate at which you can blow air into it. Peak flow helps you see how much your airways are changing, but is **not** the recommended test to identify asthma.

If you use asthma medications every day your doctor may advise you to use a peak flow meter to help you check your asthma at home. Generally children over the age of 7 are able to learn how to use a peak flow meter correctly.

Peak flow measurement is most often used as part of a Written Asthma Action Plan, developed with your doctor, to help you recognise:

- when your asthma is getting worse, or
- when you may need to increase your medication.



A peak flow meter is only one tool available to help control your asthma – if you are feeling unwell see your doctor.

It is important to find your 'best' score by recording your peak flow scores every day for one to two weeks when you are well. This score can then be used as a guide for you and your doctor to adjust your asthma management. When your asthma is not as well controlled your peak flow score will be less than your 'best'.