

Using a Peak Flow Meter to Control Asthma

A peak flow meter is a device that measures how well your lungs are working. Peak flow meters are used to check asthma the way that blood pressure cuffs are used to check high blood pressure. A peak flow meter enables you to accurately measure daily variations in breathing. During an asthma episode, the airways of your lungs usually narrow slowly. The peak flow meter may help warn you if there is narrowing in the airways hours before any asthma symptoms appear.

The peak flow meter can also help you and your doctor:

- Determine the severity of your asthma.
- Decide if your asthma treatment plan is working.
- Decide when to add or stop medicine.
- Determine when you should seek medical care.

How to Use a Peak Flow Meter

Peak flow meters are available at drugstores and pharmacies, and are easy to use.

1. Make sure the moveable marker is at zero and attach the mouthpiece to the meter.
2. Stand up straight and take a deep breath, completely filling your lungs with air.
3. Put your lips firmly around the mouthpiece.
4. Blow as hard and fast as you can with one breath. The moveable indicator will move up the scale to give the "peak flow" reading.
5. Move the indicator back to zero, then repeat two more times. Record the highest reading of the three, along with the date and time, in a chart and take it to doctor appointments.
6. Measure peak flow rate the same time each day, preferably once in the morning and once at night. You may want to measure the peak flow rate before and after using medication to see how effective the medication is.
7. Use the same process each time.

Determining Your Peak Flow Reading

Your doctor will help determine your best peak flow reading. Usually, you'll take readings one to two times a day for two weeks when you are feeling well and not having any asthma symptoms.

This reading serves as a guide in your asthma treatment plan. Everyone's asthma is different and your readings will be unique to you.

Changes in your readings may alert you to tightening of the airways hours before any asthma symptoms appear. The readings tell you when to use a quick-acting asthma inhaler or other asthma medication. By taking rescue medications before having the symptoms of an asthma attack, you may be able to stop the narrowing of the airways quickly and avoid a severe asthma emergency.



For more information on peak flow meters refer to the following websites:
www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9O0E&b=22586
www.webmd.com/asthma/guide/peak-flow-meter
www.mayoclinic.com/health/asthma/AS00018