

How to Use an Incentive Spirometer

Incentive Spirometer

After surgery, it may be difficult to breathe as you normally do. You may notice your breathing changes to small, shallow breaths. This can cause fluid and mucus to build up in your lungs, increasing your risk for respiratory system complications.

An incentive spirometer is a hand-held breathing exercise device to help you breathe deeply. Taking deep breaths allows air to inflate your lungs, opening your airways to prevent fluid and mucus buildup.

Using an incentive spirometer may speed your recovery and lower your risk of lung problems, such as pneumonia.

Before Your Surgery

If you have already been given an incentive spirometer, practice using it at home every day **before** your surgery. Doing this may improve your lung capacity and make using an incentive spirometer easier after surgery.

Important: Remember to bring the incentive spirometer (if you have one) with you to the hospital on the day of your surgery.

How to Use the Incentive Spirometer

1. Sit upright in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. (If you aren't able to sit up in a chair, sit as upright as possible.)
2. Place the spirometer on your bedside table or hold it in an upright position.

3. Place the mouthpiece in your mouth. Seal your lips tightly around the mouthpiece.
4. Inhale as **slowly and deeply** as possible through the mouthpiece. Your health care provider will work with you to set a breathing goal, which will be marked with small arrows on the incentive spirometer. As you inhale, the small square should stay between the arrows.
5. Hold your breath for 3 to 5 seconds. Then exhale slowly through pursed lips. (Pursed lips are in the shape of blowing out a candle.)
6. Repeat 10 times, resting between each time.
7. It is important to cough to clear any secretions. Coughing (clearing your airway) will make breathing easier. It will also strengthen your muscles after each use.

How Often You Need to Use the Incentive Spirometer

- **At the hospital:** You will need to use the incentive spirometer 10 times every hour you are awake after surgery.
- **At home:** You will need to use the incentive spirometer 10 times every 2 hours for your first 7 days at home.

Whom to Call for Questions

If you have any questions about using the incentive spirometer, call your health care provider.