

Using a Peak Flow Meter to Control Asthma

Peak Flow Meter

A peak flow meter can help you control your asthma by telling you when an asthma attack is coming before you notice any symptoms. You can then take your medicine to stop the attack.

Peak flow meters are most helpful if you have moderate to severe asthma.

Finding Your Personal Best Peak Flow Number

To determine your personal best peak flow number, take your peak flow each day for 2 to 3 weeks. Make sure your asthma is under control during this time.

Measure your peak flow:

- once in the morning and once at night
- right after you take your short-acting quick-relief medicine to relieve symptoms
- any other time your health care provider suggests.

The highest number you get at the end of the 2 to 3 weeks is your personal best.

Remember that these readings are only to find your personal best. Normally you will check your asthma by taking your peak flow each morning and night.

Some electronic peak flow meters also display “FEV1,” which is the amount of air exhaled (breathed out) in 1 second. Your health care provider may also want you to record this number.

Follow the instructions from your provider and the manufacturer.

Setting Your Peak Flow Zones

Your peak flow zones are based on your personal best peak flow number. The zones help you take the right action to keep your asthma under control.

- 80 to 100 percent of your personal best: **good control.**
 - Keep taking your long-term control medicine.
- 50 to 80 percent of your personal best: **caution.** You might be in danger of having an attack.
 - Make sure you have taken your long-term control medicine.
 - Take your quick-relief medicine. Your health care provider may have you increase other asthma medicines.
 - Try and avoid known triggers.
- Below 50 percent of your personal best: **medical alert.**
 - Make sure you have taken your long-term control medicine.
 - Take your quick-relief medicine and call your health care provider right away.
 - If you do not improve after taking your quick relief medicines, go a hospital Emergency Department.

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How to Take Your Peak Flow

1. Move the marker to the bottom of the numbered scale.
2. Stand up or sit up straight.
3. Take a deep breath.
4. Place the mouthpiece between your teeth and close your lips around it. Don't let your tongue block it.
5. Blow out as hard and fast as you can.
6. If you cough or make a mistake, repeat the test. Write down the number you get.
7. Repeat steps 1 through 6 two more times. Write down the highest of the 3 numbers.
8. Find which peak flow zone your peak flow number is in. Do what your health care provider has told you to do when you are in that zone.

When to Use Your Peak Flow Meter

Once you have found your personal best peak flow number, check your peak flow:

- every morning when you wake up, before you take your medicine
- every evening
- when you are having asthma symptoms or an asthma attack (and after taking medicine for the attack to tell whether the medicine is working)
- any other time your health care provider suggests.

If you use more than one peak flow meter, be sure that they are the same brand.

What to Bring to Clinic Visits

Each time you visit your health care provider, you should bring your peak flow meter and the peak flow numbers you have recorded.

Have your health care provider or nurse check how you are using your peak flow meter to be sure you are using it right.

Working Closely With Your Health Care Provider

Regular appointments with your health care provider will help you stay in control of your asthma. How severe your asthma is may change from time to time.

For example, your asthma may improve from using controller medicines as directed. Or it may worsen if triggers are not controlled. Your provider will help you manage all levels of severity.

Following your Asthma Management Plan

This is a plan your health care provider may create to help you manage your asthma. If your provider writes a plan for you, be sure to keep a copy of it.

If the asthma action plan is for your child, give a copy of it to your child's school health office.

**Information adapted from
the National Heart, Lung, and
Blood Institute of the National
Institutes of Health.**