



Peak Flow Meter

What is a Peak Flow meter?

A Peak Flow Meter is a small, easy-to-use instrument that measures how fast you can blow air out of your lungs after taking in the deepest breath you can. This number is called your peak expiratory flow. It reveals how well your lungs or your child's lungs are working.

Sometimes Peak Flow numbers will decrease hours, or even a day or two, before other asthma symptoms become evident. It is important to monitor your Peak Flow numbers regularly as any decrease in these numbers could indicate the impending onset of an asthma episode. The Peak Flow numbers, along with watching for asthma symptoms, can be used to make decisions about your asthma treatment.

How do I establish my Personal Best?

The highest number regularly blown into your Peak Flow Meter is considered your Personal Best. This is done by recording Peak Flow values for two weeks first thing in the morning before taking any medications and in the late afternoon but only when your asthma is under control.

Once you know your or your child's Personal Best, it may be helpful for you and your Allergist to use these Peak Flow Numbers to determine what to do if your Peak Flow reading is in a different "zone" than your Personal Best. The zone system can be compared to the colors of a traffic light. The following table shows an example of how these zones work and what to do if your Peak Flow reading falls below your Personal Best.

Green: 80-100% of your Personal Best:

- Your breathing is good
- You do not have any early warning signs of asthma symptoms
- Take all your medicines every day, as recommended by your Allergist
- Use your inhaler before exercise, as recommended by your Allergist

Yellow: Caution 60-79% of your Personal Best

- You have a runny, stuffy nose
- You feel more tired than usual
- Your chin or throat itches
- You experience bouts of sneezing
- You experience restlessness
- Your face is red or pale
- You are coughing more than usual
- There are dark circles under your eyes
- Use your rescue medicine
- Recheck your peak flows 20 to 30 minutes after using your rescue medicine

Red: Danger Below 60% of your Personal Best:

- You are coughing, especially at night
- You are wheezing
- Your chest feels tight or hurts
- You are breathing faster than normal
- You are short of breath or get out of breath easily
- Use your "rescue" medicine by inhaler or nebulizer right away
- Call your Allergist

How do I use my Peak Flow meter?

- Stand up or sit up straight
- Slide indicator to base of meter
- Take in deep breath
- Place mouthpiece in mouth and seal lips around it
- Blow out as hard and fast as you can (one quick blow)
- Repeat process 2 more times
- Select the highest number of the 3 efforts
- Record this number on your Peak Flow diary or on a graph

How often should I check my Peak Flow?

If you are in a stable period with your asthma and your numbers do not appear to change much, you should check your Peak Flow once a day. The best time to do this would ideally be in the morning when you first wake up. We suggest you check your Peak Flow number at least twice a day, once in the morning and again in the evening, or more often if necessary when you or your child:

- Begin to wake at night with asthma symptoms
- Are having more daytime asthma symptoms
- Have a respiratory infection, like a cold
- When you are sick or have asthma symptoms
- Need to use “rescue medicine”. This is medicine prescribed by your Allergist to be used for quick relief of asthma symptoms. If you can, check your Peak Flow before taking your rescue medicine. Then check it again 20-30 minutes later.

When should I report my Peak Flow number to my doctor?

Take your Peak Flow Meter as well as your Asthma Health Diary with you each time you visit with your Allergist. If you have an Asthma Action Plan from your Allergist, follow the Plan for each Peak Flow zone. Compare your Peak Flow numbers to your Personal Best. Here’s what we suggest based upon the relationship between your daily Peak Flow number and your Personal Best Peak Flow Number:

- If your Peak Flow is less than 80% of your Personal Best, take your rescue medication. Wait 20 to 30 minutes and check your Peak Flow again.
 - If your Peak Flow is not back above 80%, report this to your Allergist.
 - If your Peak Flow is back above 80%, recheck your Peak Flow about every 4 hours for a day or so. Call your Allergist if you continue to need rescue medicine.
- If your Peak Flow is less than 60% consider this an emergency. Take your rescue medicine, and call your Allergist IMMEDIATELY or go to the closest hospital Emergency Room right away! Your Peak Flow meter is only an aide to you.

Do not rely on your Peak Flow numbers alone when deciding whether to take your rescue medicine or call your Allergist. Your symptoms also need to be considered.

How do I keep track of my Peak Flow numbers?

Write your Peak Flow numbers on your Peak Flow sheet or Asthma Health Diary. You can make your own if you do not have one. Be sure to write down any Peak Flows that are different from your usual daily readings.

Record the date, time and Peak Flow numbers. Also note any changes in how you feel or changes in your medicines. List anything you think may be making your asthma or your child’s asthma worse. Make sure to share this information with your Allergist when you are seen for an appointment.

If you have questions about how to use your Peak Flow Meter, feel free to contact our office. One of our staff would be happy to answer your questions and discuss different treatment options offered at Allergy & Asthma Clinics of Ohio.