

Peak Flow FAQs

Q: I've never heard of a peak flow meter.

A: Peak flow meters measure the fastest speed a person can blow air out of the lungs. A peak flow meter can stop an asthma attack before it happens, because the score may drop before the doctor can hear a change with a stethoscope, and before you can notice asthma symptoms.

Q: I don't really know how or when to use a peak flow meter.

A: Read on for instructions!

Q: I know I said I would fill out an asthma diary but I keep forgetting. And I don't have a lot of extra time. Is it really useful?

A: Keeping track of peak flow scores, triggers, medicines, and symptoms is a lot to do on a daily basis, but gives you important information. Once the data are collected, you don't need to do it as often!

Q: Why use a peak flow meter if my child is taking her medicine anyway?

A: Taking medicine to control asthma is the most important thing. Peak flow scores are an early-warning system, and they reveal triggers that make asthma worse. For example, does the score go down after playing with a pet? After someone mows the grass? After being out in the cold? Were two or three triggers present at the same time? Write these in the diary.

Q: My doctor did not mention using a peak flow meter or keeping a log, but a nurse and my pharmacist said it would be a good idea.

A: If your doctor forgets, remind him/her. Bring your medicines, diary, and peak flow meter to your appointment!

How to Use a Peak Flow Meter

NOTE: If blowing into the peak flow meter makes you cough, your asthma is not under control! Tell your doctor.

1. Get the peak flow meter, a pen and your diary.
2. Put the mouthpiece on the meter (if needed).
3. Take gum or food out of your mouth and set the meter to zero.
4. Keep your fingers away from the vent holes.
5. Stand up, take a deep breath, put your mouth over the mouthpiece and **BLOW AS HARD AND FAST AS YOU CAN.**
6. Find the number that lines up with the marker. This is your score.
7. If you can, try two more times. Slide the marker back to zero and repeat.
8. Write the highest number in your diary.

Personal Best

Q: How do I find my (or my child's) Personal Best peak flow?

A: The "personal best" peak flow is the highest score a person can get, over a 2-week period, when asthma is under good control. (Good control means feeling good without any asthma symptoms.) A person's "personal best" is the number to which all other peak flow readings are compared.

To find your personal best peak flow score, take peak flow readings:

- 2 times a day for 2 weeks when asthma is in good control
- At the same time in the morning and early evening
- Before using any rescue inhaler

Write the personal best score on your peak flow diary.

Once you know the personal best, you and your doctor can calculate what peak flow scores correspond to:

- Over 80% of personal best - "Green Zone"
- 50-80% of personal best - "Yellow Zone"
- Less than 50% of personal best - "Red Zone"

...and make an Action Plan for what to do in each zone.

Example of One Person's Action Plan:

Green zone: Keep taking any scheduled controller medicines ("green medicines"). Check peak flow daily.

Yellow zone: Keep taking green medicines, and add rescue albuterol by inhaler or nebulizer. Check peak flow frequently. Increase controller medicine for 3 days. Call or email doctor for update.

Red zone: Keep taking yellow medicines. Rescue albuterol every 20 minutes for 3 doses. If rescue albuterol doesn't resolve symptoms, call doctor's cell phone or go to Urgent Care/Emergency Room. If rescue albuterol IS working, add oral steroids and call doctor's cell phone.

Emergency room, or call 911, IF:

Medicine isn't helping and person is getting worse

Breathing hard and fast, ribs sucking in, nostrils flaring open

Can't walk or talk normally

What next?

Continue to take peak flow readings each morning. These will help you:

- Recognize early drops in airflow, and follow Action Plan before getting worse
- Know when the personal best improves with treatment, or whether treatment isn't working
- Know when the personal best improves naturally as a child grows.