

YOUR PEAK FLOW (PEF) METER

[A handout for the student and family]

A peak flow meter is a device that measures how well air moves out of your lungs. During an asthma episode, the airways of the lungs usually begin to narrow slowly. The peak flow meter may tell you if there is narrowing in the airways hours - sometimes even days - before you have any asthma symptoms.

By taking your medicine(s) early - before symptoms - you may be able to stop the episode quickly. Peak flow meters are used to check your asthma the way that blood pressure cuffs are used to check high blood pressure.

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

- ◆ Learn what makes your asthma worse
- ◆ Decide if your treatment plan is working well
- ◆ Decide when to add or stop medicine
- ◆ Decide when to seek emergency care

A peak flow meter is most helpful for patients who must take asthma medicine daily. Patients age 5 and older are usually able to use a peak flow meter. Your doctor or nurse will show you how to use a peak flow meter. **Bring your Peak Flow Meter to each visit with your doctor.**

How to Use Your Peak Flow Meter

- ◆ Do the following 5 steps with your peak flow meter:
 1. Move the indicator to the bottom of the numbered scale
 2. Stand up.
 3. Take a deep breath, filling your lungs completely.
 4. Place the mouthpiece in your mouth and close your lips around it. Do not put your tongue inside the hole.
 5. Blow out as hard and fast as you can in a single blow.
- ◆ Write down the number you get. If you cough or make a mistake, don't write down the number. Instead, do it over again.
- ◆ Repeat steps 1 through 5 two more times and write down the best of the three blows in your Asthma Diary.

Find Your Personal Best Peak Flow Number

Your personal best peak flow number is the highest peak flow number you can achieve over a 2 to 3 week period **when your asthma is under good control**. Good control is when you feel good and do not have any asthma symptoms. Your treatment plan needs to be based on your own personal best peak flow number.

To find your personal best peak flow number, take and record peak flow readings:

- ◆ At least twice a day for 2 to 3 weeks
- ◆ When you wake up and between noon and 2:00pm
- ◆ Before and after you take your short-acting inhaled beta₂-agonist for quick relief (if you take this medicine).
- ◆ As instructed by your doctor.

The Peak Flow Zone System

Once you know your personal best [PB] peak flow number, your doctor will give you the numbers that tell you what to do. The peak flow numbers are put into zones that are set up like a traffic light. This will help you know what to do when your peak flow numbers change. For example:

- ◆ **Green Zone** (more than _____ L/min signals *good control*. No asthma symptoms are present. Take your medicines as usual.
- ◆ **Yellow Zone** (between _____ L/min and _____ L/min signals *caution*. You must take a short-acting inhaled beta₂-agonist right away. Also, your asthma may not be under good day-to-day control. Ask your doctor if you need to change or increase your daily medicines.
- ◆ **Red Zone** (below _____ L/min signals a *medical alert*. You must take a short-acting inhaled beta₂-agonist (quick relief medicine) right away. Call your doctor or emergency room and ask what to do, or go directly to the emergency room.

Record your personal best peak flow number and peak flow zones in your Asthma Diary.

When you purchase or are given a new Peak Flow Meter you must find your personal best peak flow number with the new meter.

Use the Asthma Diary to Keep Track

Measure your peak flow when you wake up, before taking medicine. Write down your peak flow number in the diary every day or as instructed by your doctor.