



# Peak Flow Meter

## Patient and Family Education

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**This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.**

### **What is a peak flow meter?**

A peak flow meter measures how well air moves out of your child's lungs. It checks your child's breathing like a thermometer checks his temperature. During an asthma attack (also called an episode), the airways in the lungs narrow. This makes it harder for air to move out of the lungs. So the peak flow number will be lower as the airways become narrow.

One of the first signs that an asthma attack is coming is a decrease in peak flow score below the "personal best" (explained below). The peak flow number may drop before you notice other signs of an asthma attack such as wheezing or shortness of breath. **Starting treatment early at home is the best way to keep an attack from getting worse.**

### **How to use a peak flow meter:**

1. Place the sliding marker on the numbered scale at 0 (Some peak flow meter brands require shaking the meter, like you would a thermometer, to get the marker to 0).
2. Have your child stand up.
3. Have your child take a very deep breath - until he can't breathe in any deeper.
4. Put the meter in your child's mouth and make sure he seals his lips tightly around the mouthpiece.
5. Have him blow out through only his mouth as hard and fast as he can.\*
6. Find the number where the sliding marker stopped - this is your child's peak flow score.
7. Repeat steps 1-6 two more times. Write down the highest score your child got in those three tries.
8. Clean the peak flow meter once a week by wiping the mouthpiece with warm water and allowing it to dry.

\* Be sure your child is trying his best when blowing on the peak flow meter. A weak effort on the meter will result in a lower peak flow score than usual. However, if your child coughs forcefully into the peak flow meter, the peak flow score will be unusually high.

### **What is a normal peak flow score?**

A normal peak flow number (also called a peak flow score) is different for each person. Your child's doctor can tell you your child's expected peak flow score (also called the predicted score), but because your child has asthma, he may not be able to get his predicted score.

It is preferred to find out your child's "personal best" score. This is the highest score your child gets on the peak flow meter over a two-week period when his asthma is under good control. Use the calendar on the next page to write down the peak flow score for two weeks so that you may determine your child's personal best score.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

# Peak Flow Meter, continued

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## How to find your child's personal best score:

- When your child is feeling good and his breathing is normal, measure the peak flow twice a day for two weeks.
- Write the numbers down on the calendar.
- At the end of two weeks, find the biggest number. That is your child's personal best score.
- If your child has an attack during those two weeks, do not use those scores to find the personal best. Wait until the attack is over and then start again.

**NOTE:** Determine the new personal best score at least once a year. This number may change as your child grows. It is also important to determine your child's personal best score each time you get a new peak flow meter, even if it's the same brand. There is some change between all peak flow meters, just like your weight may be slightly different depending on which scale you use. Therefore, your child should use the same peak flow meter all the time.

## How often does my child use the peak flow meter?

Once your child's personal best has been established, most doctors recommend that children use the peak flow meter once a day. By using it every day, you will be better able to notice an asthma attack early and start medicines early. It may be helpful to write down the daily score on a calendar.

## Peak Flow Zones

Your child's doctor will set up peak flow zones based on either the predicted or personal best score. His doctor should also tell you what medicines to give and what actions to take in each zone. The zones will help you and your child manage his asthma based on daily peak flow scores.

### The zones are set up like a traffic light:

**Green Zone:** GO! Asthma is under good control. Peak flow score is 80-100% of predicted or personal best score.

**Yellow Zone:** CAUTION! Asthma attack is coming. Peak flow score is 50-80% of predicted or personal best score. Refer to your Asthma Action Plan (AAP). If you do not have one, call your child's doctor.

**Red Zone:** STOP! Get help. Your child is having an asthma attack. Peak flow score is below 50% of predicted or personal best score. Refer to your Asthma Action Plan (AAP) and call your child's doctor.

**Reminder:** Always take your child's peak flow meter and calendar (if you write score down daily) to doctor's visits so his doctor can see how well he is doing.

**In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.**

