



## **Asthma: Your Peak Flow Meter**

The peak flow meter measures the speed of the air that comes out of your lungs as you breathe out hard and fast. When you have an asthma attack, the airways in your lungs narrow, reducing how fast you can breathe out. The peak flow meter is an easy way of knowing when your airways are beginning to narrow, hours or even days before you notice any symptoms of an asthma attack. You and your doctor can take steps to stop the episode quickly and prevent worsening symptoms.

Your peak flow meter can also help you and your doctor learn what makes your asthma worse, decide how well your treatment plan is working and whether any changes need to be made to your medications. It will also help you to decide when you need emergency care.

### **Starting Out: Find Your Personal Best Peak Flow Number**

Because everyone is built differently, everyone's personal best peak flow will be different. It is important to find out your own personal best peak flow number. This number will be very important for setting up your treatment plan and controlling your asthma as well as possible.

To find out your personal best peak flow number, take your peak flow reading every day for two weeks at a time when your asthma is under good control. Write down the number you get for each peak flow reading. The highest peak flow number you get consistently for the two weeks is your personal best. Your personal best can change over time, and your doctor may recommend checking for a new personal best from time to time.

#### **How to Take Your Peak Flow**

- Hold the peak flow meter in your hand.
- Stand up, or sit up straight.
- Take a deep breath, filling your lungs completely.
- Place the mouthpiece in your mouth and close your lips around it. Don't put your tongue in the hole.
- Blow out as hard and fast as you can in a single breath.

Do this three times, and write down the highest of the three numbers you get. If you cough or make a mistake, don't count that try and redo it.

### **Following the "Traffic Signal"**

Check your peak flow daily.

Once you have established your personal best peak flow number, your doctor can help you divide your readings into zones like a traffic light. Together you and your doctor may also formulate an "Asthma Action Plan" for you to follow depending on which zone your peak flow falls.



## **Asthma: Your Peak Flow Meter (cont.)**

- ❖ **GREEN ZONE** – 80% or better of your personal best. When you are in this zone, your asthma is in good control. Take your usual controller medicine and follow your usual routine.
- ❖ **YELLOW ZONE** – Between 50% and 80% of your personal best. This zone signals caution. Use your reliever medication right away. Think about whether you have been exposed to anything that triggers your asthma (smoke, cold air, pollen, or animal dander, for example) and what you can do to avoid triggers. Call your doctor to ask if you need to change your daily medications.
- ❖ **RED ZONE** – 50% or less of your personal best. This zone signals a medical alert. You must use your reliever inhaler right away, then call your doctor. If you have formulated an “Asthma Action Plan”, follow those instructions for the Red Zone.

