

Spirometry Testing

If you have symptoms of shortness of breath, a chronic cough or an increase or change in mucus production for more than just a short period of time, and you have a history of smoking or heavy exposure to dust or chemicals, talk to your doctor. Your doctor will ask you questions about your health history and will ask you to describe when you have trouble breathing. It's important to be honest about your smoking history, any exposures to pollutants or chemicals, and when your symptoms started. Your doctor will probably order a spirometry test.

The results of this test, together with the information you provide to your doctor, will help determine if you have COPD.

Q: What is a spirometry test?

A. Having a spirometry test done is important for the diagnosis and treatment of chronic bronchitis, COPD and emphysema. A spirometry test, is a lung function test that helps a doctor determine if you have a lung condition. The test measures the volume of air you are able to exhale. It takes a couple of minutes to complete. It is noninvasive, pain-free and done by simply blowing forcefully into the spirometer. If you've been told by your doctor that you have one of these conditions and you have NOT had a spirometry test, you should ask your doctor to schedule one for you.

Q: Who should have a spirometry (breathing test) performed?

A: Spirometry will reveal changes in lung function when symptoms are still very mild or even before symptoms appear. If you have been diagnosed with a lung disease or you are a smoker or a former smoker, you should have a spirometry test. Others that should consider a spirometry test are individuals with long-term exposure to chemicals or irritants at work.

Once diagnosed it's equally important to have repeated spirometry testing so the doctor can evaluate how your treatment plan is working or to monitor the course of your condition. Ask your doctor about when you should be tested again.

Q: How can I tell how my lungs are doing?

A: The spirometer measures two important numbers: FEV1 and FVC. These numbers represent the volume of air you're able to breathe out in one second as well as the total volume of air you are breathing out. Your numbers are calculated and compared against predicted values based on other people with the same gender, height and age. Become familiar with these numbers and have your doctor explain what these numbers mean to you and your lung health.

Do you know your numbers?

FEV1 ____ FVC ____