

No 4. Tests for Asthma

- **Diagnosis**

To make sure that a correct diagnosis of asthma is made your doctor or nurse will first ask you about your symptoms and how they are affecting you. Your doctor may then listen to your chest for wheezes or crackles.

- **Peak flow rate**

The most commonly used and single most important test in asthma management is the peak flow rate. Peak flow rate is a measure of how quickly you can blow air out of your lungs. If your airways are inflamed and narrowed your peak flow will be reduced. You and your doctor or nurse can use your peak flow measurements to help see how well controlled your asthma is. It is important to see how much your peak flow varies between morning and night and from day to day. Because of this your doctor or nurse may ask you to do a series of peak flow measurements and record the results in a peak flow diary. Peak flow meters are available on prescription from your doctor. You will also be given a peak flow diary to record your results and be shown how to use a peak flow meter.

You should check your peak flow twice a day – in the morning and in the early evening – before you use your inhalers.

Your peak flow record will help you and your doctor or nurse assess whether the treatment you are getting is effectively controlling your asthma or whether you may need a change of treatment.

Your doctor or nurse may use your best peak flow reading to help prepare a self-management plan for you which will tell you what to do if your asthma symptoms get worse or your peak flow starts to fall.

How to measure your peak flow rate:-

- **Set the marker on the peak flow meter to zero**
- **Stand holding the meter horizontally in front of your mouth**
- **Breathe in as deeply as possible**
- **Put your lips firmly around the mouthpiece**
- **Breathe out as hard and as fast as possible**
- **Take note of the reading shown by the marker**
- **Repeat the above twice more**

- **The highest reading of the three measurements is your peak flow at that time and should be recorded in your peak flow diary. (Note: All three readings must be roughly the same – if they are wildly different then keep doing the test until you get three readings that are roughly the same and record the best of those three as your peak flow).**

If your child has difficulty using the peak flow meter don't worry – just wait for a time and try again when a little older.

- **Chest X-Ray**

Your doctor may ask you to go for a chest X-ray to help make sure your symptoms are due to asthma.

- **Pulmonary Function Tests**

This involves blowing into a mouthpiece as hard as you can for as long as you can. A nurse or technician will tell you how to do the test and encourage you to blow as hard as you can to get your best possible result. Pulmonary function tests can give more information to your doctor or nurse than peak flow rates but are usually only needed if your asthma symptoms are not improving with treatment.

- **Skin tests for allergy and blood tests**

These are only needed for some people and are usually organized by a hospital clinic.

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