

Check Your Lung Function

(The following is an excerpt from Mayo Clinic [2008]. Asthma treatment: 3 steps to better asthma control <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/asthma-treatment/AS00011>.)

Lung function tests can help determine your level of asthma control. Decreased lung function is a sign you need to adjust your medications according to your treatment plan. If you're following your treatment plan but still have decreased lung function, work with your doctor to adjust your medications. There are two primary lung function tests:

- **Peak flow.** By learning how to use a simple, hand-held device called a peak flow meter, you can detect subtle changes in your airways before you notice symptoms. A peak flow meter can be used at home to measure how well you can breathe. Peak expiratory flow (PEF) is the reading that indicates the fastest rate at which you force air out of your lungs. If your PEF readings are lower than usual, it's a sign your asthma may be about to flare up. Your doctor can give you instructions on how to deal with low readings as part of your asthma treatment plan.

- **Spirometry.** Spirometry tests are lung function (pulmonary) tests done at your doctor's office with a machine called a spirometer. Some people also use a hand-held spirometer to take measurements at home. Spirometry tests measure how much air your lungs can hold and how much air you can exhale after you've taken a deep breath. This measurement is called forced expiratory volume (FEV). Your doctor compares your FEV measurement with the predicted result for people who don't have asthma. This comparison is expressed as a percentage. Lower percentages mean your lungs aren't working as well as they should be, a sign your asthma is flaring up.

Source: Mayo Clinic (2008) Asthma treatment: 3 steps to better asthma control [online]. Retrieved September 2, 2010. From <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/asthma-treatment/AS00011>.

