About spirometry



What is spirometry?

Spirometry is a breathing test that shows how well your lungs are working. It uses a machine to measure how much and how fast you can blow air out of your lungs. The machine is called a spirometer.

Why do I need the test?

Spirometry is used to diagnose and monitor lung conditions like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). The results help your doctor plan the right treatment for you. You may have the test again later to check how well your lungs are working over time and whether your medicines are helping.

What happens in a spirometry test?

A spirometry test takes about 20-30 minutes.

In the test:

- You will blow into a tube connected to a machine.
- You will take a deep breath then blow out as hard as you can, for as long as you can.
- You will do this several times to check that the readings are similar each time.
- You may be asked to use a short-acting reliever inhaler, such as Ventolin (salbutamol), during the test. The test is then repeated to see if your breathing improves.

You may feel tired or dizzy from the effort of the test. This is normal and usually passes quickly. You will have time to rest between each big breath out. The healthcare professional performing the test will explain each step and support you during the test.

Sometimes you may also have other breathing tests, such as a FeNO test. This test can show whether there is inflammation in your airways, which may be a sign of asthma.

After the test

You can return to your normal activities straight after the test and use your inhalers as usual.

The test can take a lot of effort, so it is normal to feel a little tired afterwards.

Your doctor or nurse will discuss your results with you. This may happen when the test finishes, or at a later appointment. They will explain what the results mean for your lung health and treatment. You can also ask for a copy of your results and add them to My Health Record. Depending on the results, your doctor may refer you to a specialist lung testing clinic for other breathing tests, such as a FeNO test, or to a lung specialist.

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Common questions about spirometry

Is the test safe?
Spirometry is a very low-risk test. It is not painful, but it does require effort. Taking several deep breaths and blowing out hard and fast can make some people feel a little tired or dizzy for a short time.

When might I need to delay the test?
You may need to delay the test if you have recently had surgery or have been sick with a chest infection, cold or flu. Recent heart problems, a stroke, or problems with your blood pressure may also affect whether you can do the test. Tell your doctor if you have had any of these. They will decide if it is safe for you to do the test. If you can't do spirometry testing, there may be other ways of testing your lungs. Discuss this with your GP or specialist.

How will I know how to do the test?
The healthcare professional performing the test will guide you through each step. They will tell you how and when to breathe in and out to get the best results. They may ask you to repeat the breath a few times to get a clear result.

How much will it cost?

Spirometry is usually low cost. Some clinics bulk bill, which means you do not pay anything. Other clinics charge a fee, and Medicare may pay some of the cost back. Before your appointment, ask the clinic how much the test will cost and how much money you can get back from Medicare.

Getting ready for spirometry



What to bring:
Any medicines, inhalers or spacers you use.



What to wear:
Loose, comfortable clothing.



8 hours before:
Do not drink alcohol.



2 hours before:
Avoid eating a large meal.



1 hour before:
Do not do heavy exercise.



1 hour before:
Do not smoke or vape.



Some inhalers need to be stopped before the test. Check with your doctor or clinic about which inhalers you need to stop and when to stop them.
If you need to use your reliever inhaler before the test, let the healthcare professional performing the test know.

For more information:

Lung Foundation Australia

Lung Foundation Australia
Lung Health Helpline 1800 654 301
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ASTHMA AUSTRALIA

Asthma Australia
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National Asthma Council AUSTRALIA

National Asthma Council Australia
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