

# Using an Incentive Spirometer



Deep breathing expands the lungs, aids circulation and helps prevent pneumonia.

An incentive spirometer is a device that helps you do deep breathing exercises after surgery.

It also helps lower the risk of breathing problems if you have a lung disease or condition. These exercises expand your lungs, aid in circulation, and may help prevent pneumonia. Deep breathing exercises also help you breathe better and improve the function of your lungs by:

- Keeping your lungs clear
- Strengthening your breathing muscles
- Helping prevent respiratory complications or problems

The incentive spirometer gives you a way to take an active part in your recovery. A nurse or respiratory therapist will teach you breathing exercises. To do these exercises, you will breathe in through your mouth and not your nose. The incentive spirometer only works correctly if you breathe in through your mouth.

Your healthcare provider or their staff will explain how to use the device, provide your targeted volume(s), and provide other helpful tips to prevent complications (such as pain, dizziness or feeling lightheaded) when blowing in the incentive spirometer.

## Steps to Clear Lungs

**Step 1. Exhale normally. Then, inhale normally.**

- Relax and breathe out.

**Step 2. Place your lips tightly around the mouthpiece.**

- Make sure the device is upright and not tilted. Sit up and breathe out (exhale) fully.
- Tightly seal your lips around the mouthpiece.

**Step 3. Inhale as much air as you can through the mouthpiece. Don't breathe through your nose.**

- Breathe in (inhale) slowly and deeply.
- Hold your breath long enough to keep the balls, piston or disk raised for at least 3 to 5 seconds, or as instructed by your healthcare provider.
- Exhale slowly to allow the balls, piston or disk to fall before repeating again.
- Note: Some spirometers have an indicator to let you know that you are breathing in too fast. If the indicator goes off, breathe in more slowly.

**Step 4. Repeat the exercise regularly.**

- Do sets of 10 exercises every hour while you're awake or as instructed by your healthcare provider. Don't do more than 30 breaths in each set.
- If you were taught deep breathing and coughing exercises, do them regularly as instructed by your provider, nurse or respiratory therapist.

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### **Follow-up care**

Make a follow-up appointment as directed by your healthcare provider. If your symptoms don't improve and continue to get worse, follow up with your provider as advised.

### **When to call your healthcare provider**

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4° (38°C) or higher, or as advised by your provider
- Brownish, bloody or smelly sputum (phlegm that you cough up)

### **Call 911**

Call 911 if any of these occur:

- Shortness of breath that doesn't get better after taking your medicine
- Cool, moist, pale or blue skin
- Trouble breathing or swallowing, wheezing
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Feeling of dizziness or weakness, or a sudden drop in blood pressure
- Feeling very ill
- Lightheadedness
- Chest pain or rapid heart rate