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Air It Out – Electronic Version. Vol. 16, Issue 8, #2 August 2009

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HOW AND WHY TO USE A PEAK FLOW METER

* If you don't have asthma, you've probably never heard of this important device. A **peak flow meter** (pfm) is a **diagnostic tool** that measures how well air moves out of the lungs. A wonderful tool for those with moderate to persistent asthma, it can be **used** alone or in combination with observation **to determine the severity of an asthma flare**. It can **also** be used **BEFORE an asthma flare occurs** because it helps to discover if there are any blocks or narrowing in the airways hours or even days before other asthma symptoms appear.

* Using a peak flow meter routinely and recording the results in a **"diary" or log** helps a patient, the parent and the healthcare provider in many ways. These **"readings"** can **help determine** if the current medication plan is working well; when to **"step-up"** (add) or **"step down"** (stop) or change medications, identify triggers and they may also be the first indicator that emergency help is needed.

* The pfm **isn't a good tool with children under age 5 or 6** years. Little ones find it difficult to learn and master the techniques required. But for those 5 and up, with proper education, coaching and praise, the habit of using a peak flow meter consistently and keeping a log or diary of the readings will become a valuable diagnostic tool for asthmatics. The **pfm log** can be **used to help the healthcare provider develop an asthma action plan**.

* There are many different brands and types of peak flow meters but they all operate on the same basic principle. The patient blows air into the mouthpiece which pushes a marker or indicator to a number. Peak flow **"readings"** should be done **in the morning before any asthma medications** have been used and to be most effective, every patient should have a **"personal best"** reading which means the **highest reading taken when the patient is in good health** with no asthma symptoms. **To determine the personal best score**, the patient uses the pfm at least once daily for about two weeks, recording the scores each time. The personal best score is the highest reading over this time period. This score is the individual patient's **"benchmark"** for lung capacity when healthy; all other readings are compared to the personal best.

*There is a **right way to use a peak flow meter. DO**

- ☺ stand as still and straight as you can and put the indicator back to "zero" before each blow
- ☺ take a deep breath in and put your lips tightly around the mouthpiece to make an airtight seal
- ☺ keep your tongue out of the way and blow out fast and hard in ONE single blast of air. Fast and hard, not slow
- ☺ keep fingers and hands away from the indicator, the slot or holes on the pfm
- ☺ record the number on the indicator in your diary or log, wait a moment or two, then repeat this process two or more times and use the highest peak flow rate out of the 3 attempts to get your reading
- ☺ clean the pfm according to the manufacturer's instructions and use the same brand each time because readings will vary with different manufacturers
- ☺ always take your meter and your diary or log with you when you visit your healthcare provider

* There is a **wrong way to use a peak flow meter. DON'T**

- ☹ sit down when blowing into the meter
- ☹ blow out into the meter before taking a deep breath
- ☹ put your tongue (or gum) in the mouthpiece
- ☹ blow a short breath or more than one breath
- ☹ breathe in while the pfm mouthpiece is in your mouth
- ☹ cover the indicator, slot or holes with your fingers or hands
- ☹ drop the peak flow meter

* Your healthcare provider will **use the "personal best" reading** to develop an individualized **Asthma Action Plan according to color zones**. If your reading is in the Green Zone (your current reading is 80%-100% of the "best") you have no asthma symptoms, no emergency or rescue medications are needed. If your reading is in the Yellow Zone (50%-80% of the "best") then caution should be taken. It can indicate that an asthma flare has started or may be starting and rescue or emergency medication may be needed as well as controller medications. If your reading is in the Red Zone (less than 50% of your "best") this signals danger! The patient is having an asthma flare or exacerbation: rescue medication is needed immediately and medical attention may be needed if improvement doesn't occur quickly. For more information on asthma and allergy, contact info@aafatexas.org or see our website: www.aafatexas.org

Upcoming AAFA-TX programs: 1) **Aug. 17**, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists, Ft. Worth, instructor: Jeanette Arnold, MSN, CFNP, AE-C. Pre-registration required. Ft. Worth ISD nurses are automatically registered. 2) **Aug. 24**, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses, respiratory therapists and educators, Cleveland, Ohio. Instructor: Maureen George, PhD, RN, AE-C. Pre-registration required. Cleveland P. S. nurses automatically pre-registered. 3) **Aug. 25** "Tools to Manage Asthma & Allergies" worksite wellness program, Gulfstream Aerospace, Dallas, Eric Schmitt, MD, instructor 4) **Sept. 3**, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists, Seattle, WA, instructor: Carol Lilley, RN, BSN, AE-C. Pre-registration required. Seattle Public School nurses are automatically pre-registered. For more info or to register, contact info@aafatexas.org or see www.aafatexas.org/events

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