

PULMONARY FUNCTION TESTING



What is pulmonary function testing (PFT), and why has your physician ordered this test for you?

A pulmonary function test is used to measure how well the lungs take in and release air and how well they move gases such as oxygen from the atmosphere into the body's circulation. Most often, this assessment will be made through a spirometry test. In a spirometry test, you breathe into a mouthpiece that is connected to an instrument called a spirometer. The spirometer records the amount and the rate of air that you breathe in and out over a period of time.

Pulmonary function tests are used in many clinical situations. It is used when a patient has a history or symptoms suggestive of lung disease; asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, COPD or when the patient has risk factors such as cigarette smoking. It is also used to evaluate complaints of difficulty in breathing, exertional cough, or chest pain. PFTs are also used to differentiate between shortness of breath that exists in both lung and cardiac diseases.

How do you prepare for the test?

If you are on bronchodilators, your physician may ask you not to use the inhaler before the test. The decision to avoid long- and short-acting bronchodilators is dependent on the question being asked. If the study is performed to diagnose an underlying lung condition, then avoiding bronchodilators is useful. If the study is

carried out to determine a response to an existing therapeutic regimen, then one may choose not to withhold bronchodilator medications.

Before coming for your lung function test, remember to avoid the following:

- Smoking within at least 1 h of testing
- Consuming alcohol within 4 h of testing
- Performing vigorous exercise within 30 min of testing
- Wearing clothing that substantially restricts full chest and abdominal expansion
- Eating a large meal within 2 h of testing

What should you expect to do during the test?

You will be given a small device that is approximately 6cm in length. It will contain a disposable tube in which you will place your mouth. You will be asked to blow into the device as hard as you can, and for as long as you can. The test could be performed in either a sitting or standing position; sitting position is preferred. If dentures are worn and interfere with blowing into the machine, they may be removed.

What will you gain from doing a PFT?

Your physician will review the results from the PFT. Results will then be integrated into a potential diagnosis; normal pulmonary function, Asthma, COPD etc. Therapy/ prognosis and or further referral will be provided to manage the pulmonary disease.

Information obtained through the American Thoracic Society

<http://www.thoracic.org/statements> Tamara K. Jansz-PA-Student, Touro College