

Pulmonary Function Testing

What is a Pulmonary Function Test?

Pulmonary function testing may involve one or several tests of your lungs including spirometry, lung volumes, diffusion testing, and oxygen saturation measurement by oximetry or blood gas sampling. These are tests that determine how well your lungs are functioning. The main procedure involves blowing into a tube with your nose plugged. We measure the volume, flow, and oxygen transfer capabilities of your lungs. Pulmonary function testing is very safe and a needle is only required if your doctor has required arterial blood gases to be drawn. This test requires your cooperation. A doctor must order this test by faxing that request. If you have been given a requisition form by your doctor, please bring it with you.

Why did my doctor order this test?

There are many lung disorders, the most common being asthma, emphysema, bronchitis, and lung fibrosis. There are also heart, muscle, and arthritic diseases which can affect the lungs. People can have symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath, and wheezing.

Your doctor will use the results of your pulmonary function test to help diagnose breathing problems or diseases and to determine if breathing medications can improve your health.

How should I prepare for this test?

- Wear loose fitting clothing, no tight garments.
- If possible, please do not take your inhalers/puffers for four hours before the test. The most common inhalers include: Bricanyl, Ventolin (Salbutamol), Airomir, Oxeze, Atrovent, Serevent, etc.
- Please arrive 15 minutes before your test time so that you can register with our receptionist.
- You can eat small amounts before this test.
- Please do not smoke nor drink coffee prior to the test .
- Bring a list of your medications and allergies.
- Be prepared to give a brief history of your health and symptoms.
- If you do not speak English, please bring a family member with you to interpret.
- Parents of young children (under 16 years of age) will be required to stay with their child for the test.
- If you think you may have an infectious disease, please let the technologist know before testing.

How long will the test take?

The test lasts approximately 45 minutes to one hour. After the majority of breathing tests are performed our patients are given up to four puffs (400 mcg) of Ventolin. Approximately 10 minutes later the therapist will have you retry the first breathing test. This is a simple way of determining if the Ventolin has had an effect on your breathing.

Why should I have this test done at a hospital?

At Oak Ridge Health Centre, we strive for quality testing by qualified technologists. We follow the guidelines of the American Thoracic Society strictly and perform the tests on state-of-the-art equipment. We are the only centre in this area to have a body plethysmograph (body box). All breathing tests are interpreted by a Respiriologist. This is a physician that specializes in breathing problems.

When will I get the results?

Please be aware that the technologist is not allowed to give you the results of your pulmonary function test. The report will be interpreted by a respirologist on staff or by your own respirologist. A copy will then be sent to your family doctor and that may require approximately several days.

If you are seeing your respirologist or family doctor within two weeks of the test, please advise the technologist so that we will fax a report copy to your doctor.

Methacholine Tests: Do not use any inhaled medications for at least 5 days before test. Please confirm stopping these medications with your physician.