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Spirometry – Patient Information – Basic Breathing Test

This leaflet has been written to provide information about a breathing test called (Spirometry) we hope it answers some of the questions or concerns you may have. It is not intended to replace talking with medical or nursing staff.

What is Spirometry?

Spirometry is a basic breathing test which measures the amount of air you can blow out. Your GP/Practice Nurse has requested this test to assess your lung function.

How is it done?

The Practice Nurse performing the test will measure your height and weight then ask you to sit upright in a chair and hold the device (Spirometer). You will then be asked to take a deep breath in and blow into the device slowly and gently then as hard and fast as you can until your lungs are completely empty. This routine will be repeated to ensure the results are consistent.

Reversibility Test – Assessment for Asthma

Your Doctor or Nurse has requested this test to help diagnose if you have asthma. This requires you to perform an initial test. You will then be given an inhaler and will have the test repeated 15 to 20 minutes later. The inhaler given is called Salbutamol, a commonly used inhaler designed to open up your airways. The effects last approximately 4 hours and the practice Nurse will show you how to take the inhaler via a spacer.

Will I feel any Pain or discomfort?

The test is not painful but can feel a little uncomfortable. Some patients experience light-headedness. You will be encouraged to do as much as you can, you will be given time to recover between tests.

Occasionally some patients feel shaky after they have been given the inhaler. This is also normal.

How long will the test take?

The test will take between 40-60 minutes. Some of this time may involve waiting while any medication we give you takes effect.

What are the benefits of having Spirometry?

Your GP/Practice Nurse will use the results of the test to help them diagnose problems with your breathing or monitor existing breathing conditions.

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How should I prepare for spirometry?

- You must bring your inhaler (Salbutamol) and Volumatic (Red/White Box) to your appointment. You must collect your prescription from the chemist. If you fail to bring these items with you to the appointment the nurse will not be able to perform the test.
- Do take any current medication as prescribed as normal
- Do not smoke in the 24 hours prior to the test.
- Do not drink alcohol on the day of the test.
- Do not have caffeine e.g. tea/coffee in the four hours before the test.
- Avoid eating a large meal 2 hours before the test.
- Avoid vigorous exercise in the last 30 minutes prior to your test.
- Please wear non-restrictive, comfortable clothing.

For your comfort please empty your bladder just before your appointment.

If on the day of your test you have a chest infection please ring the surgery to cancel and re-book the appointment for when you have been well for at least 6 weeks. A chest infection and/or oral steroids will affect your test and give your GP/Practice Nurse invalid results.

What are the risks involved?

The procedure is performed in large numbers at this surgery and is very low risk. You should tell the GP/Practice Nurse if you have any of the following:

- Coughed up blood recently.
- Collapsed Lung
- Had a heart attack within the last six weeks.
- Uncontrolled angina.
- Had a stroke in the last six weeks.
- Had any eye surgery in the last six weeks.
- Had any thoracic or abdominal surgery in the last six weeks.
- Any thoracic abdominal or cerebral aneurysms.

What can I expect after the test and when can I resume normal activities?

Once the test is over you can go home and resume your normal activities straight away. You should also continue taking your inhalers as normal.

When do I get the results?

The Practice Nurse performing the test may not be able to give you any results at the time of the appointment. They will ask you to make a further appointment with the GP or respiratory nurse.