Peak Flow Monitoring and Zones

Peak flow numbers measure how well you are breathing. If your peak flow number drops, it means you are having trouble breathing. Most of the time when your asthma is controlled your peak flows will be in the Green Zone. Peak flows that fall below this range will either be in your Yellow (Warning) zone, or your Red (Emergency) zone. Peak flows can be used to help monitor the severity of an asthma exacerbation as well as follow your improvement during the recovery phase. Of course they are also helpful just for reassurance during times when your asthma is well-controlled.

Not everyone needs to check peak flows and many younger asthmatics will not be able to make the necessary effort to produce a consistent peak flow reading. If your doctor recommends peak flow monitoring for you, it is generally because your asthma has been, or is becoming more difficult to manage by observing warning symptoms alone. The addition of peak flow monitoring offers another “window” into the condition of your airways and your overall asthma control. Peak flow devices are relatively inexpensive and can be performed easily at home, school, or in the workplace.

Whether you monitor your peak flows daily or intermittently will depend upon your doctor’s recommendation, the severity of your asthma, and the rapidity of the onset of your exacerbations. The goal is to take action as soon as possible during the onset of an asthma exacerbation with an Action Plan based on your peak flow reading and the use of rescue medications that have been helpful for you in the past. Please see our article “Take Control of Your Asthma with an Action Plan” for more details.