

Using your cough peak flow meter

A guide for people with
Multiple Sclerosis (MS)



Muscle weakness can be a common symptom of Multiple Sclerosis (MS) and a loss of muscle strength in the chest and abdomen can be the most common cause of breathing problems. If your chest muscles are weak, breathing and coughing may take more effort and cause you to become tired more easily.

The cough peak flow meter will measure how strong your cough is and this will allow the team to review and monitor for any changes. In between clinic appointments we would like you to use the cough peak flow meter and record your results as this is a helpful guide to identify if there might be any deterioration in your breathing muscle weakness. The MS team may suggest a referral to the respiratory team depending on your results.

This booklet will provide you with a step-by-step guide on how to use your cough peak flow meter. You will also be able to record your results so you can discuss these with your specialist team.

How to identify if your breathing muscles are becoming weak

Symptoms that might suggest that your breathing muscles are getting weaker may include:

- Feeling breathless (when resting or lying flat)
- Shallow breathing
- Difficulty in clearing your chest
- Chest infections
- A weak sniff
- Disturbed sleep
- Feeling very tired during the day
- Nightmares or hallucinations
- Morning headaches
- Poor concentration or feeling confused
- Weaker voice
- Poor appetite

Breathing stacking

There are various ways that you can try to improve the strength of your cough. A simple method is called breath stacking which you can try by following these steps:

- Make sure you are sitting down
- Breathe out fully
- Take a big breath in and hold for a few seconds
- Try to take another breath and hold again (you can repeat this several times)
- You may need to cough to clear to clear any phlegm
- Repeat this up to five times, resting in between each cycle (it is normal to sometimes feel a little lightheaded during this so take your time and stop if you need to).

How to use your meter

- Attach the mouthpiece (or mask) to the peak flow meter
- Check that the meter is set to zero
- Take a deep breath in
- Create a seal around the mouthpiece with your mouth. If you are using a mask, hold the mask tightly to your face covering your mouth and nose (you may need somebody to help you with this)
- Cough as hard as you can into the mask
- Check and record the flow reading
- Reset the meter to zero then repeat two more times
- Make a note of the best reading

You should check your cough peak flow every week.

Results

Keep a record of your peak flow readings below:

Normal: more than 360L

Green: 270-360L

Amber: 160-270L

Red: Less than 160L

Date	Best reading

Contact us

If your cough peak flow scores are getting lower (particularly if they are in the amber or red zone), or if you are experiencing any issues with your breathing please call the MS nurses to discuss your results

Tel: **0113 392 8117**

Email: **leedsth-tr.mymnurse@nhs.net**



What did you think of your care?

Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/nhsleedsfft

Your views matter



© The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust • 1st edition (Ver 1)
Developed by: Paula David, MS Clinical Nurse Specialist
Produced by: Medical Illustration Services • MID code: 20240227_002/NR

LN005804
Publication date
04/2024
Review date
04/2027