Positive expiratory pressure (PEP) therapy

Taking deep breaths will fill your lungs with air and help exercise your lungs. Filling your lungs with air is done by breathing in slowly and deeply. We call this inhalation. It helps open the air sacs in your lungs and helps prevent future problems. Blowing out air from your lungs is called exhalation. It helps to rid the body of a gas called carbon dioxide. A positive expiratory pressure (PEP) breathing device (such as the Acapella®) uses inhalation and exhalation to keep your lungs healthy. Also, when blowing the air out of your lungs or exhaling, the PEP device provides vibrations you will feel in the airways of your lungs.

Learning to use the PEP device is easy. You should try to do 10–20 repetitions each time you use the device. Remember to use your PEP device at least 4 times a day. Of course, if you want to use it more often that is O.K. The more you do this breathing exercise the happier and healthier your lungs will be.

Using the PEP device should help you:

- Increase or maintain your inhaled lung volume (amount of air you breathe in on a single breath);
- Improve your ability to rid your lungs of mucus by providing vibrations as you exhale through the device; and
- Possibly avoid serious lung infection, especially after surgery or a procedure.

If you have any questions about the PEP device or PEP therapy after reading this Do You Know... handout, please talk to the respiratory therapist, doctor or nurse.
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Using your PEP device

1. If this is the first time you will use your PEP device, the respiratory therapist or nurse will determine on what level your frequency adjustment dial should be set. With each use, make sure the dial is on this setting.

2. Sit with elbows resting on a table and relax.

3. Take in a deep breath and hold it for 2–3 seconds.

4. Place the mouthpiece lightly in mouth. Breathe out (exhale) through the PEP device slowly and smoothly. Be sure to keep a tight seal on the mouthpiece when breathing out.

5. Perform 10–20 breaths with each use. You should use your PEP device 4–6 times per day.

Cleaning your PEP device

Cleaning your PEP device properly is very important to decrease the risk of infection. The PEP device should be cleaned every night at bedtime. That way when you wake up in the morning it will be clean and dry and ready for use. Please, do not use bleach to clean the device, and do not put it in the microwave.

1. Take apart the PEP device. There are 4 parts to be cleaned: A. the cover, B. the base, C. the mouthpiece, and D. the rocker.
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2. Soak the parts in warm soapy water for 15-20 minutes. When in the hospital, use a plastic basin and hand soap to clean it. When discharged, any dish detergent can be used. The PEP device is also dishwasher safe. It is very important to rinse your PEP device thoroughly with warm water.

3. Be sure to air dry the PEP device on a paper towel. Put the cover back on the base for drying.

4. In addition to the 4 parts to be cleaned each day, in some cases, a filter will be in place between the mouthpiece and the device itself. This filter will be used for a week, and then exchanged for a new one. The filter helps prevent infection, in addition to the daily cleaning. If at any time the filter becomes wet or dirty, it should be thrown away and a new filter inserted.

Questions?

To learn more about using the positive expiratory pressure (PEP) device or about taking care of your lungs, talk to your doctor, nurse, or respiratory therapist.