

An incentive spirometer is a device that helps patients breathe deeply after surgery. These deep breathing exercises expand the lungs, help prevent pneumonia and improve lung function by:

- Keeping the lungs clear
- Strengthening the breathing muscles
- Preventing respiratory complications or problems

Using an Incentive Spirometer

When using your incentive spirometer, be sure to breathe through your mouth. If you breathe through your nose, the device won't work properly. You can hold your nose if you need to.

Your healthcare provider will show you how to use the device, give you a targeted volume(s), and provide helpful tips to prevent problems (e.g., pain, dizziness, feeling lightheaded) when using the incentive spirometer. If you feel dizzy at any time, stop and rest. Try again at a later time.

To use your incentive spirometer:

1. Sit upright and hold the incentive spirometer at eye level. Exhale normally. Then, inhale normally. Relax and breathe out.
2. Hold the device upright and not tilted. Place your lips tightly around the mouthpiece. Slowly breathe out (exhale) fully.
3. With your lips still tightly around the mouthpiece, breathe in (inhale) slowly and deeply through your mouth. As you take a breath, you will see the balls, piston or disk rise inside the large column. Hold your breath long enough to keep the object raised at the targeted volume for 3 to 5 seconds. After 3 to 5 seconds, exhale slowly through your mouth. Rest for a few seconds.
4. Repeat the exercise 10 times. Try to get the piston, ball or disk to the same level with each breath.
5. After each set of 10 breaths, try to cough, holding a pillow over your incision as needed. Coughing will help loosen or clear any mucus in your lungs.
6. Repeat these steps every hour that you are awake, or as instructed by your healthcare provider.

Note: Some spirometers have an indicator to let you know that you are breathing in too fast. If the indicator goes off, breathe in more slowly.

Follow-Up Care

Make a follow-up appointment as directed by your healthcare provider or if your symptoms get worse. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher or if you cough up brownish, bloody or smelly phlegm.

Please call 911 or visit the nearest emergency room if you experience serious side effects such as trouble breathing or severe confusion.