

Infection Prevention: Incentive Spirometry

Incentive spirometry is a lung exercise that helps strengthen and expand your lungs by forcing you to take deep breaths. Your doctor may recommend you perform incentive spirometry as you recover from surgery in order to prevent an infection, or if you are on bed rest for a long period of time.

If you have a lung infection like pneumonia, or have COPD, incentive spirometry can help get rid of any excess fluids in your lungs, helping you breathe easier and feel better.

“Well, incentive spirometry is something that just helps keep your lungs open and working well.”

To properly exercise your lungs, use an incentive spirometer and take slow, deep breaths. To use an incentive spirometer, sit up as straight as you can in a chair, or in your bed. Hold the spirometer at shoulder level. Breathe out as much as you can and put the mouthpiece in your mouth, making sure your lips form a tight seal around it.

Take a breath in slowly, keeping the small ball on the right between the two indicator arrows. As you breathe in, the large ball in the left-hand chamber will rise. Your healthcare provider will show you how high the ball should rise, by setting a sliding goal marker on the side of the air chamber. Your job is to breathe in deep enough to raise the ball to the goal marker. If you can raise it higher, go ahead.

Hold your breath for 5 seconds and let the ball fall slowly back down to the bottom of the spirometer. Remove the mouthpiece and breathe out normally. Perform this routine as often as your healthcare team tells you to but you may do your exercises as often as five to ten times every hour. Coughing after your exercises will help clear your lungs even more. As your breathing and lungs improve, your healthcare team may set new goals. Simply move the indicator on the outside of the spirometer to your new goal level and continue to exercise your lungs.

Many people continue incentive spirometry at home after they are discharged from the hospital. Keep a record of your incentive spirometry results. This will help your healthcare provider monitor your progress. Your incentive spirometer is a medical device. Besides your healthcare provider, do not let anyone else touch it. To avoid infection, wipe or wash your mouthpiece as directed.

Incentive spirometry can help you prevent lung infections and help make your breathing easier. Do your exercises as directed to get the most benefit. And if you feel new pain while doing your lung exercises, tell your healthcare provider right away.