

Glossary of Pulmonary Function Terms

If you're talking to your doctor about [pulmonary function testing](#), it helps to know key terms. This glossary contains some common words your doctor may use when talking about lung disease and tests for lung function.

Glossary

Alpha-1 Antitrypsin Deficiency – A genetic condition that can affect all age groups. It may lead to *emphysema* at an early age (30-40 years old).

Alveoli or Air Sacs – Microscopic grape-like structures in the airways of your lungs. Gas exchange takes place in these air sacs.

American Thoracic Society (ATS) – Society of doctors and other healthcare workers who work to advance the science of lung health. ATS sets standards for testing pulmonary (lung) function.

Anemia – When you don't have enough red blood cells and hemoglobin (a protein that carries oxygen) in your blood.

Arterial Blood Gases (ABGS) – Sample of blood drawn from an artery, most often near the wrist. This measures acid-base balance (pH), carbon dioxide (PaCO₂), oxygen (PaO₂), and oxygen saturation (SaO₂).

Asbestosis -Lung disease that can develop after inhaling asbestos fibers. It may cause scar tissue to surround the lungs.

Bronchodilator – Medicine that dilates or opens up the airways in your lungs. You may get it from a nebulizer, inhaler, or oral pill.

Carbon Dioxide (PaCO₂) – Amount of carbon dioxide in your arterial blood. Carbon dioxide is a normal by-product of the body. You exhale it from your body when you breathe.

Congestive Heart Failure (CHF) – Excessive fluid buildup in the body due to heart weakness. It can make you feel like you're out of breath.

Emphysema – Airway disease in which the walls of the alveoli (air sacs) are damaged or destroyed.

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Farmer's Lung – Lung disease caused by breathing in wet hay or molds.

Flow Volume Curve or Loop – Graph plotting the flow (speed) and volume at which you breathe in and out during the FVC test.

Obstructive Lung Disease/COPD – [Chronic disease](#) that makes it hard to exhale or breathe out. These include emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and asthma.

Oxygen (PaO₂) – Amount of oxygen in your arterial blood.

Oxygen Saturation (SaO₂) – Percent of hemoglobin in red blood cells carrying oxygen.

Pulmonary – Anything that involves your lungs.

Pulmonary Fibrosis – Lung disease caused by scar tissue in the lungs.

Red Blood Cell (RBC) – Blood cell that contains hemoglobin. RBCs carry oxygen in your blood.

Restrictive Lung Disease – Disease that makes it hard to inhale, or breathe in. These include asbestosis, farmer's lung, and fibrosis.

Want to learn more?

For more in-depth information on this topic, please visit the [Big Fat Reference Guide \(BFRG\)](#). If you are enrolled in AlphaNet's Subscriber Portal, you can access the BFRG [here](#).