

Pulmonary Function Tests

While there are many tests and tools for looking at lung health, pulmonary function tests (PFTs) deserve special attention. That's because many Alphas report that PFTs are hard to understand.

What are pulmonary function tests?

PFTs are breathing tests that involve blowing into a tube. You do them at a hospital or clinic, under the guidance of a trained pulmonary function technician, doctor, or nurse.

PFTs are helpful for:

- preparing for lung surgery
- measuring effects of treatment
- figuring out how badly your airways or other lung tissue have been affected by Alpha-1

Your doctor will repeat PFTs as often as they think is necessary. They rarely make medical diagnoses from PFTs alone. But periodic tests help them monitor lung problems or abnormalities.

How should you prepare for pulmonary function tests?

- Wear loose clothing that doesn't restrict your breathing.
- Avoid large meals before your test. This may make it more comfortable to breathe deeply.

Note: When you make your PFT appointment, ask if you should use your inhalers before your test.

What will happen during the test?

Pulmonary function testing includes a number of different tests. The person coaching you through your testing will give you instructions before each test. If you don't understand, ask questions! For the best results, listen carefully and follow the coaching. If you feel tired, ask for time to rest.

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Are pulmonary function tests safe?

Some people are concerned about the cleanliness of PFT equipment. You may feel better knowing staff clean and disinfect the equipment between patients. Also, the equipment has filters that catch more particles than the N-95 masks we use for COVID protection.

What do the results mean?

A doctor will interpret the results of your PFTs by comparing them to predicted normal values for someone your age, size, race, and sex. These values are based on research studies of non-smoking people with healthy lungs.

What words will your doctor use?

When your doctor talks about your results they will use terms such as mild, moderate or severe. They will also use *obstructive* and *restrictive* to describe airflow and lung volume. They may also mention names of specific [diseases](#) like emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or bronchitis.

What if my PFT results are bad?

Your test results don't determine your quality of life. Many people with limited lung function live fulfilling lives!

There are many ways to keep or improve your quality of life. You can try pulmonary rehabilitation to improve your lung function and reduce your symptoms. You can join a support group and share your struggles with people who understand them.

Talk to your doctor to see what you can do. Your options might surprise you

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](#).