

Incentive Spirometry

Deep breathing is vital to your wellbeing. Deep breathing expands the small air sacs of your lungs. Deep breathing also helps keep your lungs and airways clear. You take deep breaths each hour without being aware of it. These deep breaths are automatic and occur in the form of sighs and yawns.

There are times when your normal breathing pattern changes. Your breathing becomes more shallow when:

- You are moving very little.
- You are on bedrest.
- You have pain after surgery.

You may try to avoid deep breathing after surgery to reduce pain. Taking full, deep breaths will help prevent lung problems after surgery. Pain medicine can be given to help you take deep breaths more easily.

Your nurse will explain the deep breathing and coughing exercises you will need to do after surgery. These are done to improve lung expansion. This helps prevent infection and other lung problems.

We will show you how to use the incentive spirometer. This is a tool to help you breathe deeply. Also, you need to cough when you have secretions in your lungs.

Deep Breathing After Surgery

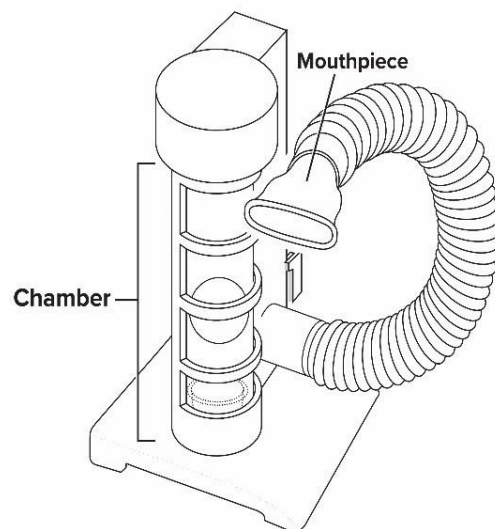
Practice these steps before surgery, so you know how to do after surgery:

1. It is best if you are in an upright position. Place your hand on your stomach. Breathe in deeply and slowly through your nose. Focus on pushing your stomach out as you breathe in. Hold your breath for a second or two.

2. Breathe out slowly and fully through your mouth.
3. Repeat two more times.
4. Breathe in again, hold your breath, and then cough (if told to do so) from deep in the lungs (not a shallow throat cough) or repeat step 2. Support (splint) your incision to decrease pain while coughing.
5. Repeat exercise.

How to Use the Incentive Spirometer

1. **Hold the unit upright.** Breathe out like normal and place your lips tightly around the mouthpiece.
2. **Take a deep breath.** Inhale enough air to slowly raise the Flow Rate Guide between the arrows.
3. **Hold the deep breath.** Continue to inhale, keeping the guide as high as you can for as long as you can, or as directed by your nurse or respiratory therapist.



4. **Breathe out and relax.** Remove the mouthpiece and breathe out like normal. After each long, deep breath, take a moment to rest, relax, and breathe normally. Repeat these steps 10 times an hour while you are awake, every day you are in the hospital or as directed by your nurse.
5. **Cough** after using your breathing tool ten times.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 5/2025. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4403.