



Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: Healthy Lung Evaluation Prior to Surgery

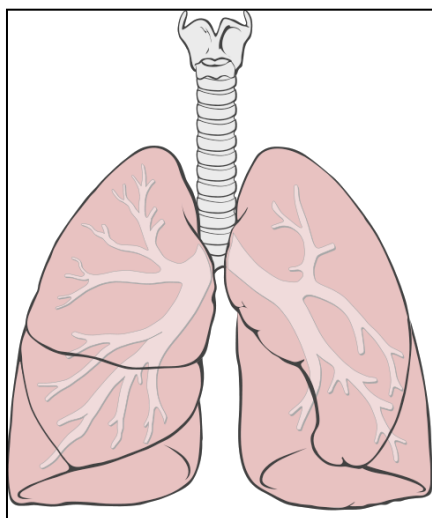
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Plain Language Summary:

Going to the doctor before your surgery:

Your surgery date is coming up. Before the surgery, your doctors will want to know how well your body is working. Understanding your lungs, heart, and body will allow them to take care of you during and after your surgery. It is important to be prepared for the questions they may ask you.

How do your lungs work in the surgery?



As you know, your lungs are vital organs that help you breathe. In the operating room, your ability to breathe is a priority. To help you breathe, the surgeons and doctors taking care of you may put a breathing tube through your mouth just before surgery. This tube will help you breathe. It will also make the surgery go by much more safely. The doctors taking care of you during your surgery will give you some medicine to help you relax and help not remember the placement of the tube. The doctors will supply healthy amounts of oxygen through the tube to help you breathe. Before you leave the operating room, the breathing tube will most likely be removed.

Healthy lungs will tolerate the breathing tube well. Gases like oxygen and carbon dioxide will flow in and out of your lungs.

A machine will monitor how well you are breathing. The doctors taking care of you will be able to take care of you safely.

What are some lung problems that you should tell your doctor about before the surgery?

It is very common to have a cough or a cold. Many times, these symptoms will not affect the surgery. Sometimes, they can be signs of more serious problems. And you should tell your doctor about them. Here are some things you should definitely tell your doctor about:

- **Asthma:** Asthma is a disease where the airways in your lungs become swollen. The swelling makes it more difficult for air to move in and out of your lungs. This problem will make it difficult to breathe. Doctors should know about asthma so they can treat you before, during and after your surgery.
- **Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease or COPD:** COPD is a disease similar to asthma. In COPD, the larger airways or even the air sacs in your lungs can become damaged and swollen. This disease will make it difficult for you to exhale. Many times, this means your

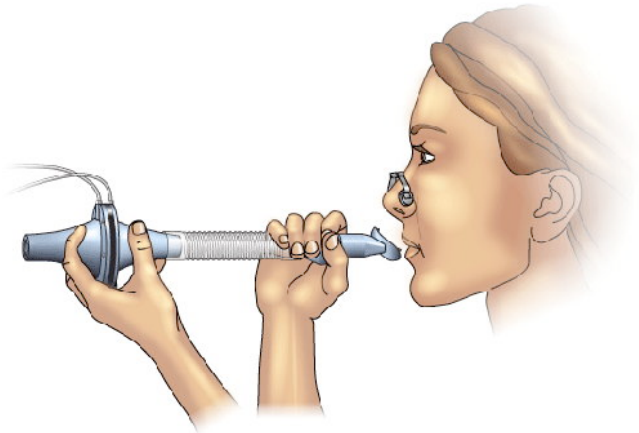
lungs will be inflated to sizes larger than normal. Your doctor will want to know if you have COPD.

- **Pneumonia:** Pneumonia is an infection of the lung. Fevers, productive cough, and body fatigue are common symptoms of pneumonia. You should tell your doctor about any of these symptoms so your doctor can treat you with antibiotics.
- **Shortness of breath:** Shortness of breath can be due to your body being tired after exerting yourself. However, it might also be a sign of some more serious. You should tell your doctor about this so that he can try to identify the underlying cause.

What will the doctor do to test how your lungs are doing?

Most of the time, the doctor will be able to test how your lungs are working by listening to your lungs with his stethoscope. He may also put a device on your finger that can tell him how much oxygen is in your blood. If you are feeling sick with a cough, he may order an X-Ray to see if you have a pneumonia.

Your doctor may or may not also order a different test to see how your lungs are doing. That test is called "spirometry." This test is able to identify those patients at risk for major breathing problems after surgery. Depending on the results of the test, your doctor may choose to postpone your surgery for another time. This is a simple, non-invasive test. Your task will be to breathe very hard and fast into a breathing tube. Your doctor can go over the results with you.



Additional Materials:

For more information:

Asthma: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/asthma/DS00021>
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/asthma.html>

COPD: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/copd/DS00916>
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/copdchronicobstructivepulmonarydisease.html>

Pneumonia: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/pneumonia/DS00135>
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/pneumonia.html>

Spirometry: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/spirometry/MY00413/METHOD=print>
Pulmonary function tests: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003853.htm>

Key words:

Preoperative evaluation

Shortness of breath

Spirometry

Asthma

COPD

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.