What Are Pulmonary Function Tests?

Pulmonary function tests (PFTs) measure how well your lungs are working. Your doctor may have ordered one or all of the following tests:

- **Spirometry**: measures how well the air flows in and out of the lungs.
- **Lung volumes**: measures how much air your lungs can hold.
- **Diffusing Capacity (DLCO)**: measures how well the lungs can take in oxygen from the air and move it into the blood.
- **Arterial Blood Gas**: this blood sample measures the amounts of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and the pH of a blood sample from your artery.

Why are the tests needed?

There are a number of reasons why your doctor may have ordered one or all of the tests. These tests give the doctor a "picture" of how well your lungs are working. It can help:

- Find out why you may be short of breath
- Find a lung disease such as asthma or chronic bronchitis
- Measure how chemicals, dust, and other substances have affected your lungs
- Measure how medicines and other treatments are affecting your lungs
- See how your lungs function before some surgeries
- Help find lung disease at an early stage before problems even occur

What will my doctor learn from PFTs?

Once your doctor has the results of your tests he can see what type of lung problems you may be having. Words like normal, mild, moderate, or severe may be used to describe your lung problem. Ask your doctor to explain the results so that you know what they mean for you. A PFT may be done as often as your doctor thinks is needed to keep track of your lung function or to look for any changes.

If you have any questions about today's tests, please contact your CF nurse