Spirometry: Lung Function Test

What is spirometry?
Spirometry is a simple test that gives information about the health of your lungs. To take the test, you must blow as fast and hard as you can into a handheld machine.

What does the test measure?
The spirometry machine measures two things: 1) the amount of air you can breathe out in one second (FEV₁) and 2) the total amount of air you can exhale from your lungs (FVC). These measurements can be used to help a doctor find out how healthy your lungs are.

How does it work?
When you breathe into the machine, the machine measures how fast the air is moving, and the amount of air you are exhaling. Because the machine measures both measurements in one exhalation; it is important to take as large a breath as you can and blast it out as strongly as you can.

What does the result tell you?
After the machine measures your breath several times, it compares your values to typical values for other people of the same height, weight, and age. Usually a score of 80% or more is considered normal.

When taking the test, you must remember the following:
1. Spirometry is only one test that can give you information about the health of your lungs. If you were taking the test at a pulmonary specialist's office, you would also take many other tests to get a clear idea of how healthy your lungs are. Because you are only performing the test once, on one day, your results do not explain everything about your lung health.

2. Many things can affect your test result. Do not be alarmed if your test results are abnormal. You may be especially tired, or you may have made an accidental mistake when breathing into the machine.

3. If you do get an abnormal result, you can consult your regular doctor, who will combine this information with your medical records. After a physical exam, and considering all of the information, your doctor will be able to tell you more accurately the health of your lungs.

Can you improve your result?
Yes. You can improve your lung health by eating healthily, exercising regularly, and not smoking!