

Airway Clearance Physiotherapy: Positive Expiratory Pressure

Airway clearance is an essential part of the treatment routine for people with CF. Performing regular airway clearance helps loosen the thick, sticky mucus from the airways so it can be cleared more easily with huffing and coughing.

What is Positive Expiratory Pressure?

Positive Expiratory Pressure (PEP) is a technique that involves actively breathing out against resistance to help keep airways open and get air behind mucus. This helps to unstick mucus from the airway walls and move it up towards the mouth where it can be cleared. PEP can be used for babies who have floppy airways or as an independent technique as children get older.

Types of PEP

There are lots of different types of PEP including bottle PEP, mouthpiece PEP, vibrating/oscillating PEP and PEP mask. A CF physiotherapist will choose the appropriate PEP device and resistance.

Bottle PEP

Bottle PEP or bubble PEP uses water to provide resistance to the breath out. It is often used to transition between Modified Postural Drainage and percussion and a PEP device in young children.

Mouthpiece PEP

Mouthpiece PEP is a device with a mouthpiece and one-way valve system that creates resistance on expiration. It can be combined with inhalation therapy (saline and hypertonic saline nebulisation) to streamline therapy.



Oscillating PEP

Oscillating or vibrating PEP devices, such as Flutter® and Aerobika®, provide variable resistance to combine positive pressure with airway vibrations. This helps shake mucus loose from airway walls.

PEP Mask

PEP mask therapy uses a close-fitting face mask with a one-way valve to provide resistance to the breath out. Different sized resistors can be used in the one-way valve to vary the pressure created on expiration. PEP mask can be used in babies, children and adults.

PEP routine

Each PEP routine will be different and should always be taught by a CF specialist physiotherapist.

In older children and adults, PEP is usually taught in an upright sitting position with elbows supported and will involve a cycle of consecutive breaths into the device, followed by huffing and coughing. PEP mask therapy for infants and small children will be different for each child but will generally involve normal breathing on the mask for a set length of time rather than a number of breaths.

Cleaning a PEP device

PEP devices should be cleaned after each use by disassembling and washing in warm, soapy water. Equipment should then be rinsed under warm running water and left to air dry before storing

Support

If you would like support with airway clearance routines at home, please contact CFWA on services@cfwa.org.au.

Useful resources

- [PEP](#) (CF Physio)
- [CF Physio 4 Kids](#)
- [PEP therapy](#) (Bronchiectasis Toolbox)
- [Airway clearance factsheets](#) (CFWA)
- [Support programs](#) (CFWA)