Key Steps — Using an incentive spirometer

A LevelUpRN clinical-skills video. The checklist follows the technique it teaches.

- ☐ 1. Sit the patient upright in bed or in a chair — or raise the head of the bed as high as they tolerate.
- ☐ 2. Hold the spirometer upright at about eye level.
- ☐ 3. Have the patient breathe out normally, then seal their lips tightly around the mouthpiece.
- ☐ 4. Ask them to breathe in slowly and deeply through the mouthpiece, raising the piston as high as they can — a slow, steady rise is the goal.
- ☐ 5. Keep the flow indicator within its marked range during the breath in; breathing in too fast makes the breath less effective.
- ☐ 6. At the top of the breath, hold for a few seconds (about five) with the mouthpiece still in place.
- ☐ 7. Remove the mouthpiece, breathe out normally, and rest with a few normal breaths before the next one.
- ☐ 8. Repeat for the set number of breaths in the patient's care plan.
- ☐ 9. Encourage a cough after the set to help clear secretions, and note the best volume achieved in the chart.

Watch the demonstration:
medicalvideos.com/watch/incentive-spirometry-clinical-nursing-skills-level-up-rn_vXwhY6LNOgbhBPy.html • More Respiratory Care skills: medicalvideos.com/nursing/respiratory-care.html
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Steps summarise this demonstration for education and do not replace your institution's protocol, which always governs. Content reviewed by Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim, MD, PhD — physician-scientist. October 2026.