

*If you have
any questions
or concerns,
please talk
with the tech.*

Pulse Oximetry

Pulse oximetry is used to check the oxygen (O₂) level of your blood. For this test, a small sensor similar to a clip-on earring is placed on your finger or earlobe. Then, using light waves, the O₂ level in the blood is measured.

A pulse oximetry, done in the Pulmonary Function Laboratory, takes about 5 minutes. However, this test often is done along with a Full Pulmonary Function test (PFT), which can take 30 to 60 minutes.

Before the Test

There is no special preparation for this test. Bronchodilator inhalers (such as Albuterol®, Proventil®, Ventolin®, Combivent® or Maxair®) can affect the test results. **Unless you are having trouble breathing, do not use these inhalers for at least 4 hours before the exam.**

On the day of the test, plan to arrive 15 minutes before your test time. Be sure to bring:

- Your doctor's written order for the test (if one was given to you)
- A list of allergies
- A list of all your current medications (prescription, over-the-counter, and herbals)
- Photo ID
- Medical insurance information
- Medicare card (Medicare patients only)

Please come to the Galter Pavilion, 201 East Huron Street. Check in at the reception desk on the 8th floor.

The parking garage is located at 222 East Huron Street, across from the Feinberg and Galter pavilions. For discount parking rates, please bring your ticket with you. Tickets can be validated at the Customer Services Desks on the 1st and 2nd floor of the Feinberg and Galter pavilions; 1st floor of Prentice (including the Prentice 24-hour desk near the Superior Street entrance).

Please tell the technologist (tech) if you have used an inhaler in the last 4 hours.

During the Test

If your hands are cold, the tech may need to warm them to get an accurate reading. This may take several minutes before the test can be done.

While you are seated in a chair, the tech will attach a small clip to your finger or earlobe. This clip will be connected to a small computer screen by a thin cord. After about 5 minutes, the O₂ level will appear on the screen. Once this level is recorded, the test is done.

After the Test

You are free to leave as soon as the test is done. There are no diet or activity restrictions.

Initial test results are sent to your doctor within 48 hours. A full report will follow in about 5 business days. If you have questions about this test, please call the Pulmonary Function Lab at 312.926.3195.

Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Pulmonary Function Lab

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