

# 6-Minute Walk for Breath

## Companion Sheet

### What is pulmonary hypertension?

PH is a disease in which the arteries of the lungs become scarred or closed off, resulting in high blood pressure in the lungs, putting stress on the heart and reducing the amount of oxygen that can reach the tissues of the body.

### What are the symptoms?

Some of the symptoms of PH include shortness of breath (especially with activity), swelling of ankles, legs, and abdomen, bluing of the hands, lips and feet, lightheadedness, and fainting. These are just some of the more pronounced symptoms of PH; patients may also experience chest pain, fatigue, coughing up blood, or a forceful or irregular heartbeat.

### What is a 6-minute walk test?

The 6-minute walk test (6MWT) is a simple test used to assess patients with PH. It measures the distance a patient can walk on a flat, hard surface for six minutes\*. During and after the test, indicators such as walk distance, level of oxygen desaturation, and breathlessness score are used to measure how the patient is doing and how well medications are working.

To learn more about PH, its symptoms, the 6MW test, and functional classes visit [phacanada.ca/sometimesitsph](http://phacanada.ca/sometimesitsph)

### What are functional classes?

Functional classification measures the limits imposed on a patient by a disease. It is a critical element in the assessment of patients with PH. Functional classification is a strong predictor of disease outcome and an important factor in making treatment decisions.

There are two functional class classification systems: the New York Heart Association (NYHA) system, which is used for all cardiac disease patients, and the World Health Organization (WHO) system, which is specific to PH patients. In practice, these are often used interchangeably.

The WHO system classifies patients in the following way:

Class I: Patients with PH but without resulting limitation of physical activity.

Class II: Patients with PH resulting in slight limitation of physical activity.

Class III: Patients with PH resulting in marked limitation of physical activity. They are comfortable at rest.

Class IV: Patients with PH with the inability to carry out any physical activity without symptoms. These patients show signs of right heart failure. Shortness of breath (dyspnea) and/or fatigue may be present even at rest.

\*How the 6MW test is administered can vary between centres. Some clinics encourage the patient to walk at their own pace, resting as needed, while others encourage the patient to push to their limit (in this case, resuscitation equipment must be present).

*This walk is intended to be an at-your-own-pace activity. If you are a patient participating in the walk, please only walk as far and as fast as you are able and do not overexert yourself.*



PULMONARY HYPERTENSION  
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA  
.....  
L'ASSOCIATION D'HYPERTENSION  
PULMONAIRE DU CANADA

# During the Walk, track your personal distance.

Using markers along your walking route or a tracking app on your cell phone, keep track of how far you've walked and compare your experience to the examples below. The examples indicate common symptoms a patient with PH may experience during a 6-minute walk test, based on their functional class. Please note that this is only meant to be a guide; every patient is different, and symptoms vary. You will notice a significant difference in how far a patient can walk based on class. This is why early diagnosis is so important: if a patient is diagnosed in early stages and started on appropriate treatment, their prognosis will be better. We group class I/II together as it is rare for a patient to be diagnosed class I.

## Marker 1: You have walked 15 metres.

- Class I/II: feeling no symptoms
- Class III: most likely not feeling any symptoms
- Class IV: feeling dizzy/lightheaded, have tightness in the chest, and are feeling very short of breath; you may need to stop and rest at this point

## Marker 2: You have walked 30 metres.

- Class I/II: not feeling any symptoms yet
- Class III: likely doing well and not feeling many symptoms at this point
- Class IV: struggling for breath; legs feel like lead; most likely you cannot continue walking

## Marker 3: You have walked 50 metres.

- Class I/II: still doing well; likely not feeling any symptoms
- Class III: experiencing some tightness in the chest

## Marker 4: You have walked 100 metres.

- Class I/II: still doing well and experiencing no symptoms
- Class III: experiencing some tightness in the chest; slight shortness of breath; the heart is starting to beat faster

## Marker 5: You have walked 150 metres.

- Class I/II: still doing well and experiencing no symptoms
- Class III: chest is feeling tighter; shortness of breath is getting worse; your pace is likely starting to slow down a bit at this point

## Marker 6: You have walked 200 metres.

- Class I/II: continue to be able to walk without much difficulty
- Class III: shortness of breath continues to get worse; starting to feel some heart palpitations and weakness; you may need to take a short break to catch your breath

## Marker 7: You have walked 250 metres.

- Class I/II: beginning to feel symptoms; beginning to feel some shortness of breath
- Class III: shortness of breath continues to increase; struggling more to walk; you may be starting to feel lightheaded and dizzy; your legs are feeling heavy

## Marker 8: You have walked 300 metres.

- Class I/II: experiencing some tightness in the chest; breath is starting to get shorter
- Class III: you are beginning to have a tough time; you are likely fighting to catch your breath

## Marker 9: You have walked 350 metres.

- Class I/II: feeling tightness in the chest; getting short of breath
- Class III: experiencing heart palpitations; having a hard time catching your breath; you are feeling dizzy/lightheaded and likely cannot walk much further

## Marker 10: You have walked 400 metres.

- Class I/II: experiencing shortness of breath; may be experiencing heart palpitations; your pace is likely slowing significantly at this point

At the 450-metre mark, you are really starting to struggle; you are having a hard time catching your breath and may need to take a breath

At the 500-metre mark: your shortness of breath and chest tightness are pretty severe; your legs may feel like they are going to give out

Many class II patients are not able to walk beyond 500 met