



Brigham and Women's Hospital

Founding Member, Mass General Brigham

Pulmonary Function Testing

Nancy E. Lange-Vaidya, MD, MPH

Division of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine

Department of Internal Medicine

Brigham and Women's Hospital

Associate Director, Pulmonary Function Testing Laboratory

Medical Director, Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program

Instructor of Medicine

Harvard Medical School



Nancy Lange-Vaidya, MD, MPH



- Cornell (Weill) Medical College
- Internal Medicine Residency and Global Health Residency @ Brigham and Women's Hospital
- Pulmonary and Critical Care Fellowship @Penn and BWH
- Instructor of Medicine @ HMS
- Director, Pulmonary Rehabilitation Program
- Associate Director, PFT laboratory @BWH
 - Clinical focus: Severe Asthma, pulmonary medicine
 - Research focus: Asthma

DISCLOSURES

- UpToDate

OBJECTIVES

- Basics of pulmonary function testing:
 - why / what / how
- Interpretation algorithm, with recent updates (2022)
 - Grading severity
 - “non-specific” impairment
 - Bronchodilator response definition
 - (Removal of race adjustment)
- Examples

Purpose of PFTs

- Aid in diagnosis of lung disease
- Evaluate patients with dyspnea
- Monitor disease progression, treatment response, toxicity
- Estimation of risk
 - Peri operative
 - Occupational

Pulmonary Function Testing

- Spirometry
- Lung volumes
- Diffusing capacity (DLCO)

Spirometry: how to do it, what we measure

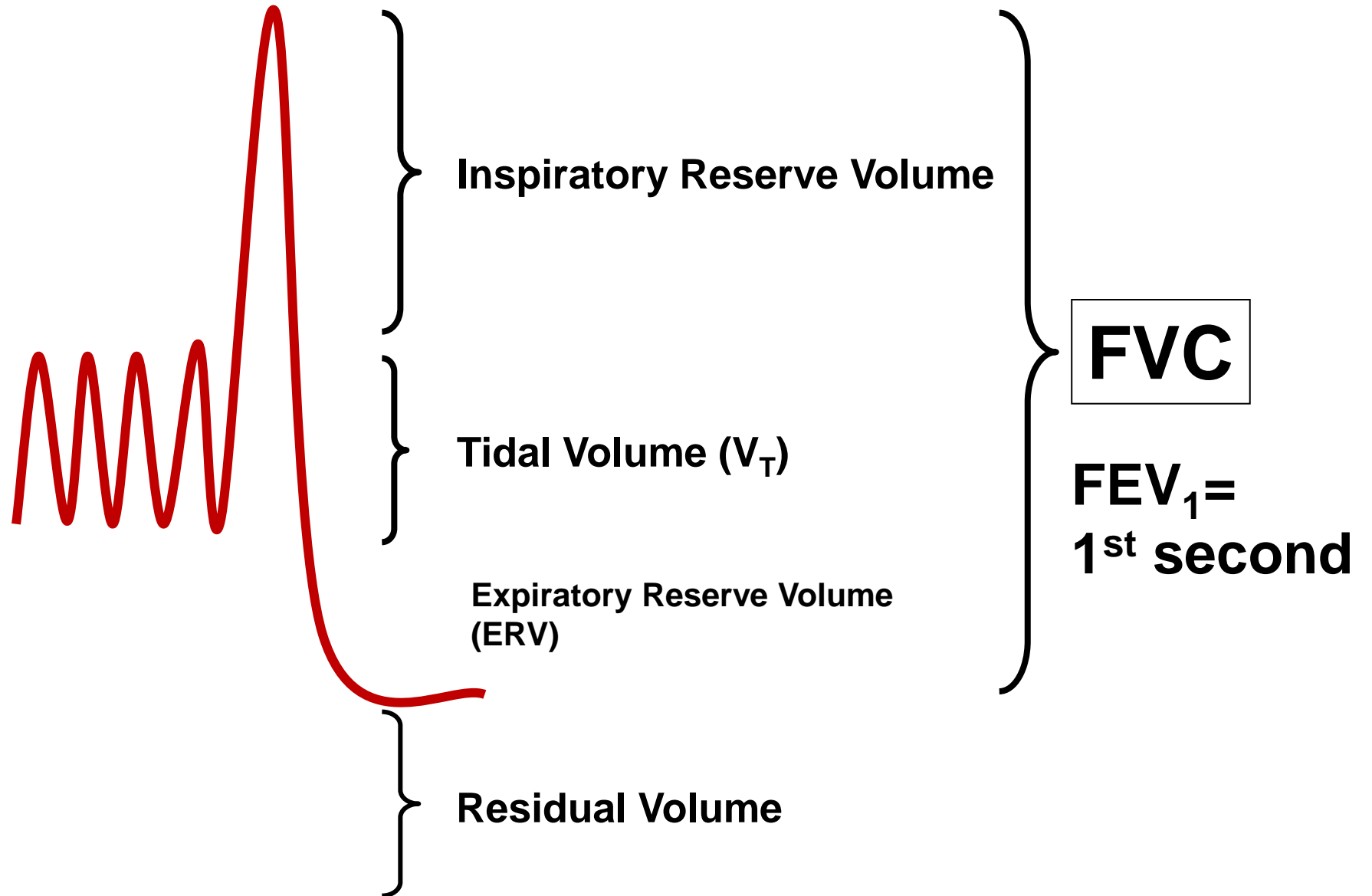
TLC

IRV

V_T

ERV

RV



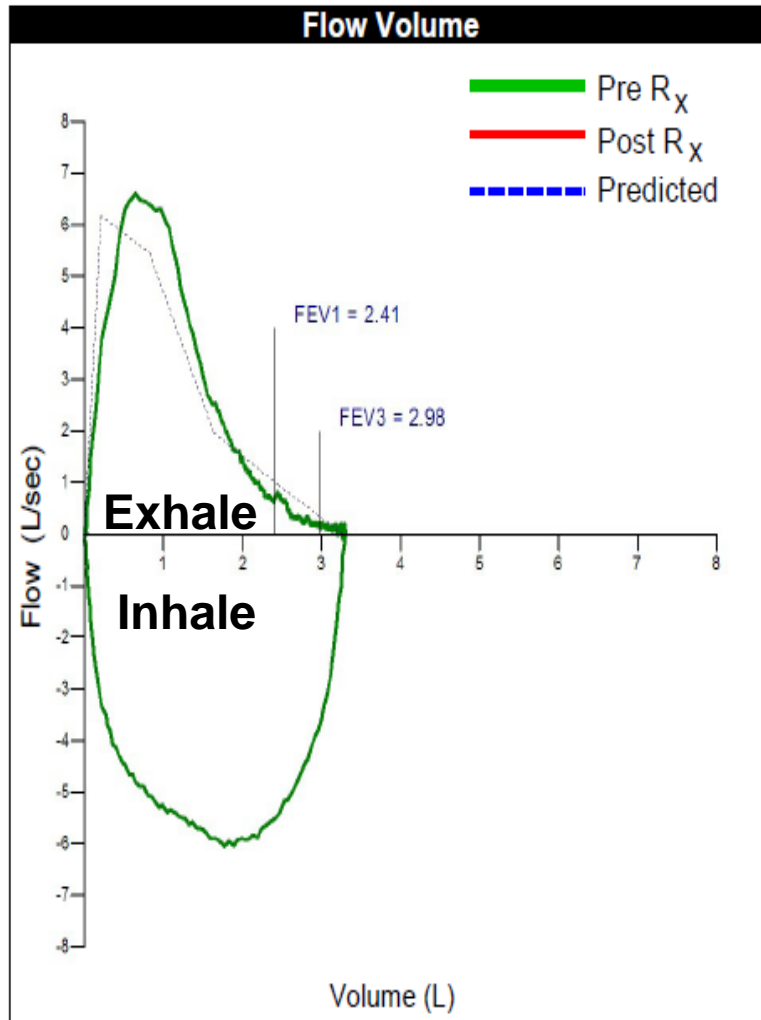
Spirometry: results

New Z score column

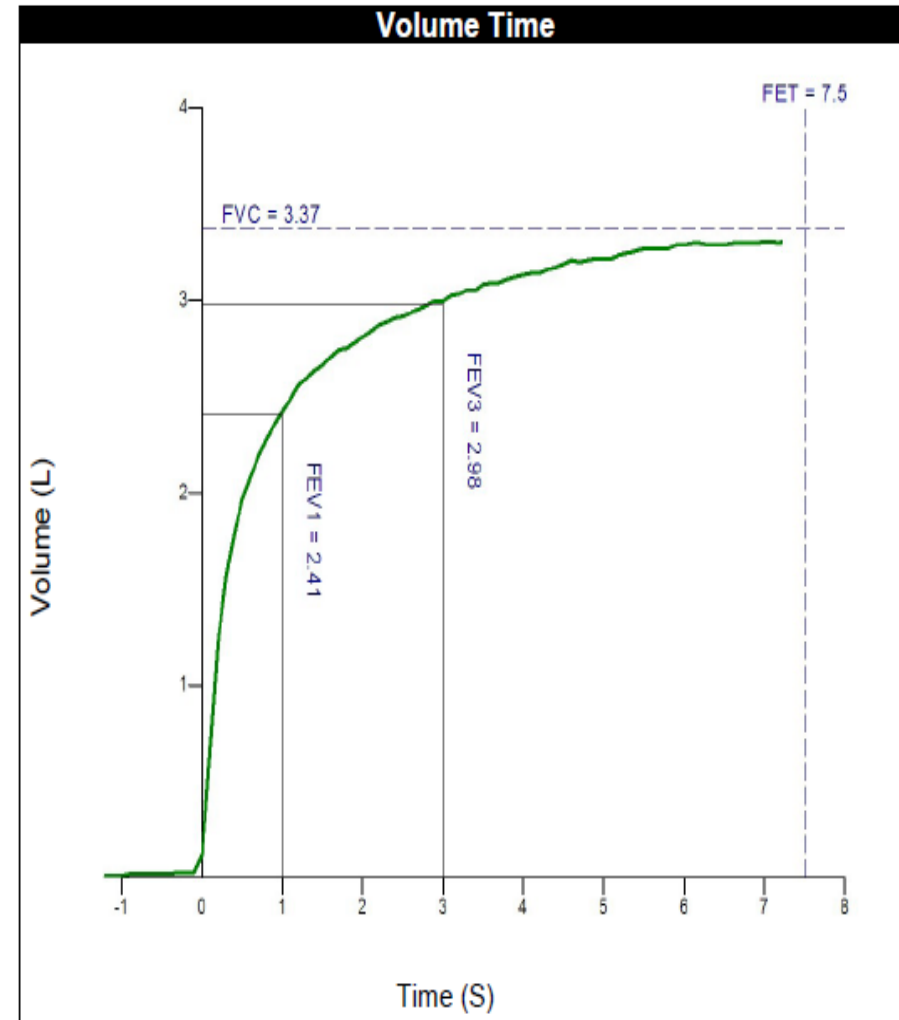


Spirometry (BTPS)		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator	
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred
FEV ₁	L	2.48	1.92	2.41	97
FVC	L	3.27	2.59	3.37	103
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	75	66	72	96

Spirometry: graphics



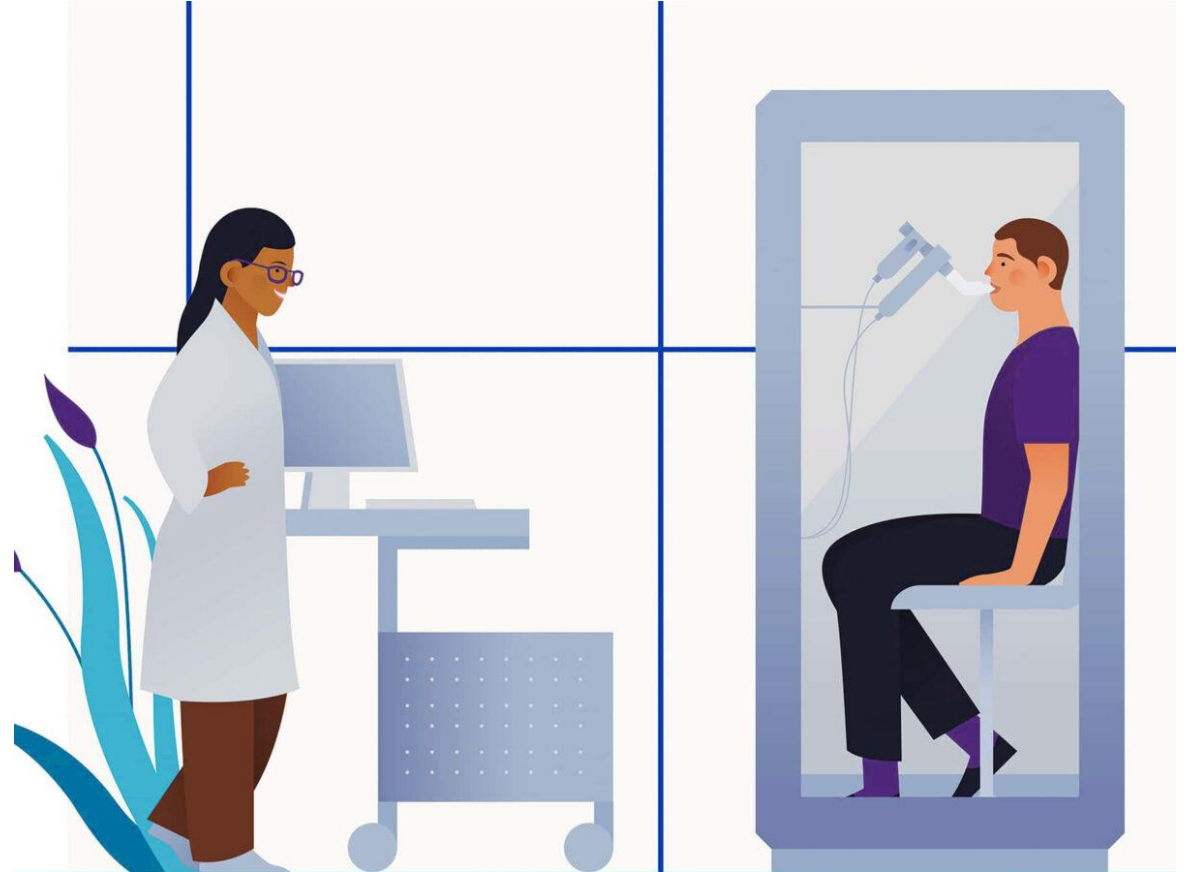
FV loop: Flow vs Volume



VT curve: Volume vs Time

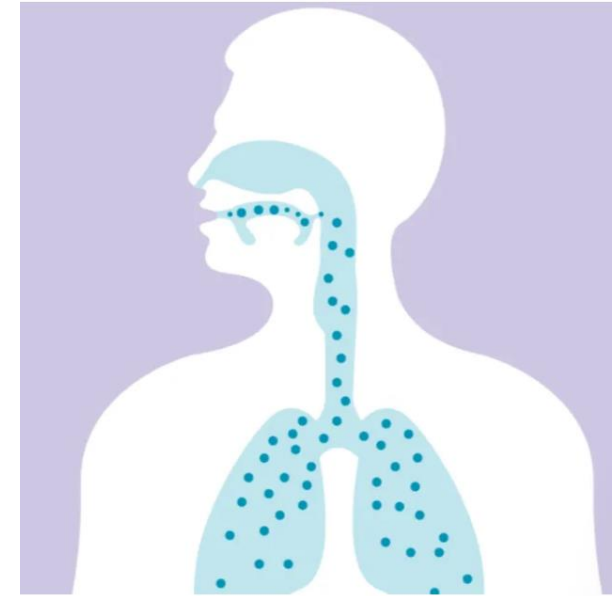
Lung volumes

- Plethysmography “body box”
- Helium dilution
- Nitrogen washout
- **TLC (total lung capacity)**
- Also information from:
 - RV
 - RV/TLC
 - FRC



Diffusing Capacity

- Patient breathes in a gas mixture that includes 0.3% CO
 - Binds 250x more avidly to Hgb than oxygen
 - Hold breath for approximately 10 sec, exhale
- Machine measures the *change in concentration of CO* and the *volume exhaled* to determine diffusing capacity (amount of CO bound to Hgb)



Types of deficits

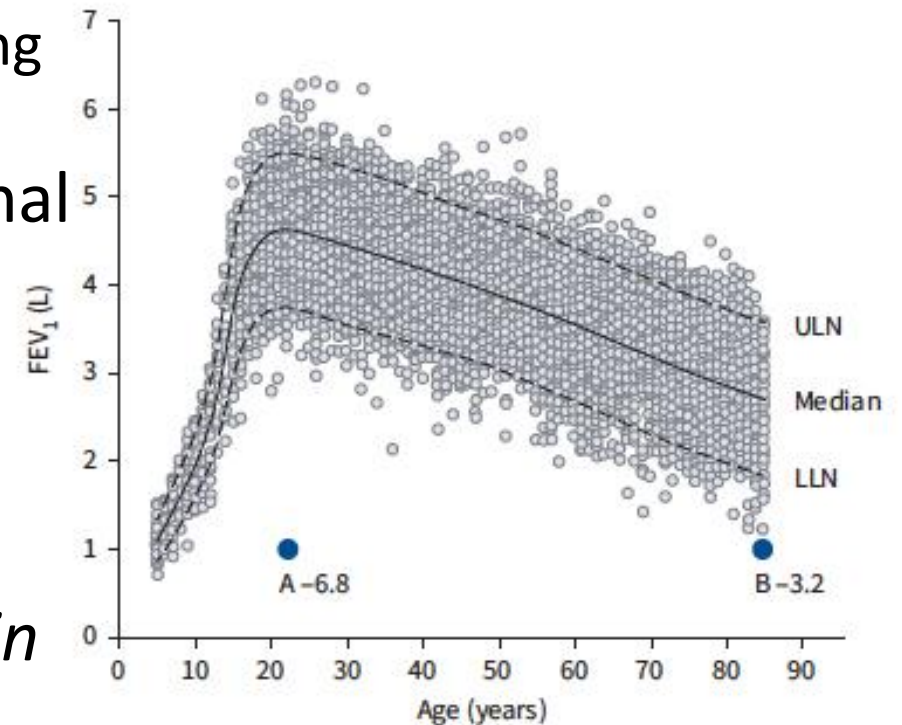
- Obstructive
 - $FEV_1/FVC < LLN$
- Restrictive
 - $TLC < LLN$
- Combined obstructive and restrictive
 - $FEV_1/FVC < LLN$, +/- $FVC < LLN$ AND $TLC < LLN$
- “Non-specific” impairment
 - $FEV_1/FVC > LLN$, FEV_1 or $FVC < LLN$ AND $TLC > LLN$
- With or without diffusion abnormalities
 - $DLCO < LLN$
- Additional considerations:
 - Hyperinflation $TLC > ULN$
 - Air trapping RV , $RV/TLC > ULN$
 - Always compare to priors when available!

Reminder: meaning of LLN

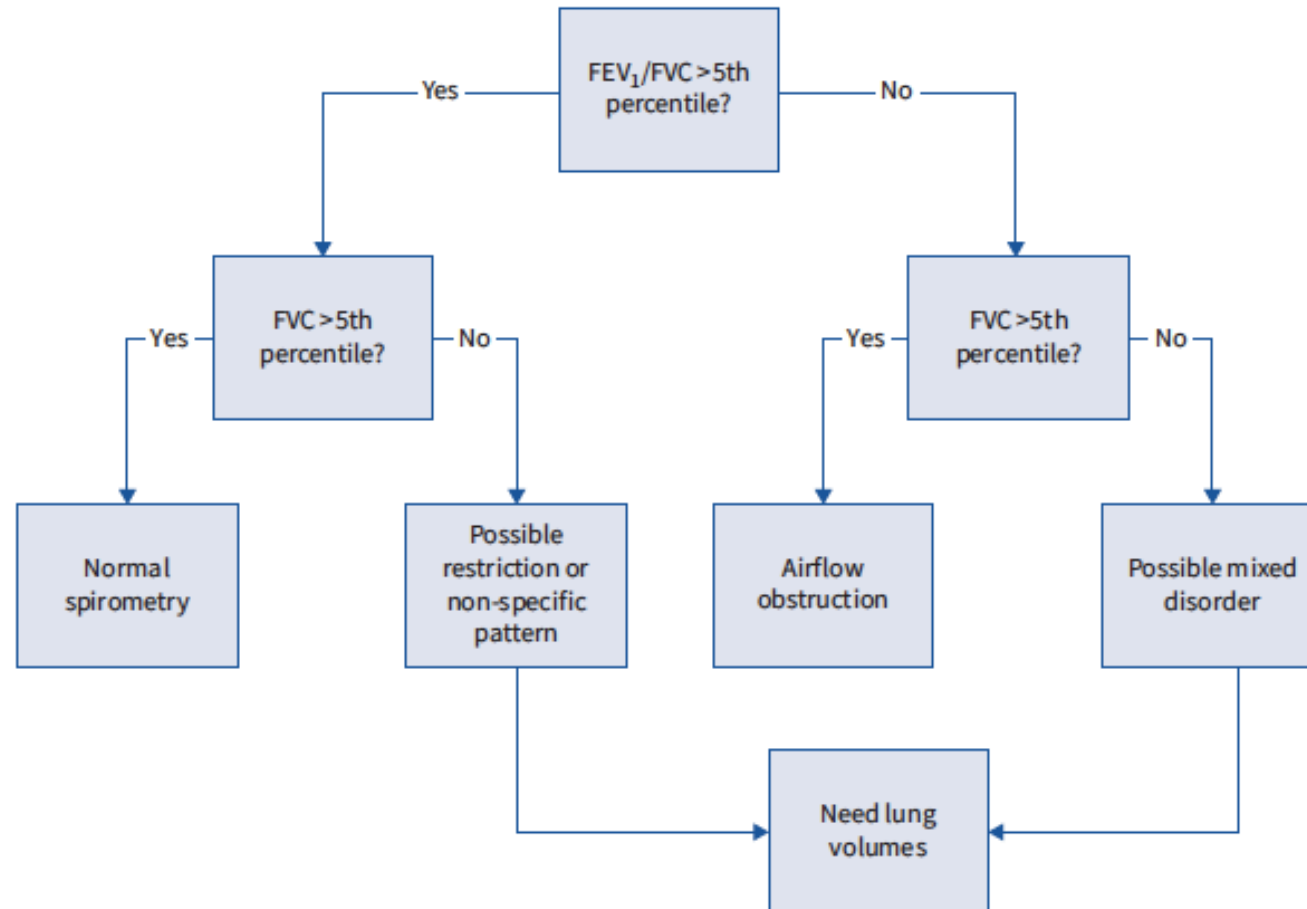
- Threshold, but not necessarily clinically meaningful
 - Does not necessarily define presence or absence of lung disease
- Low(er) chance ($\leq 5\%$) this number is within normal range (based on the reference population)
 - Continuum

Also

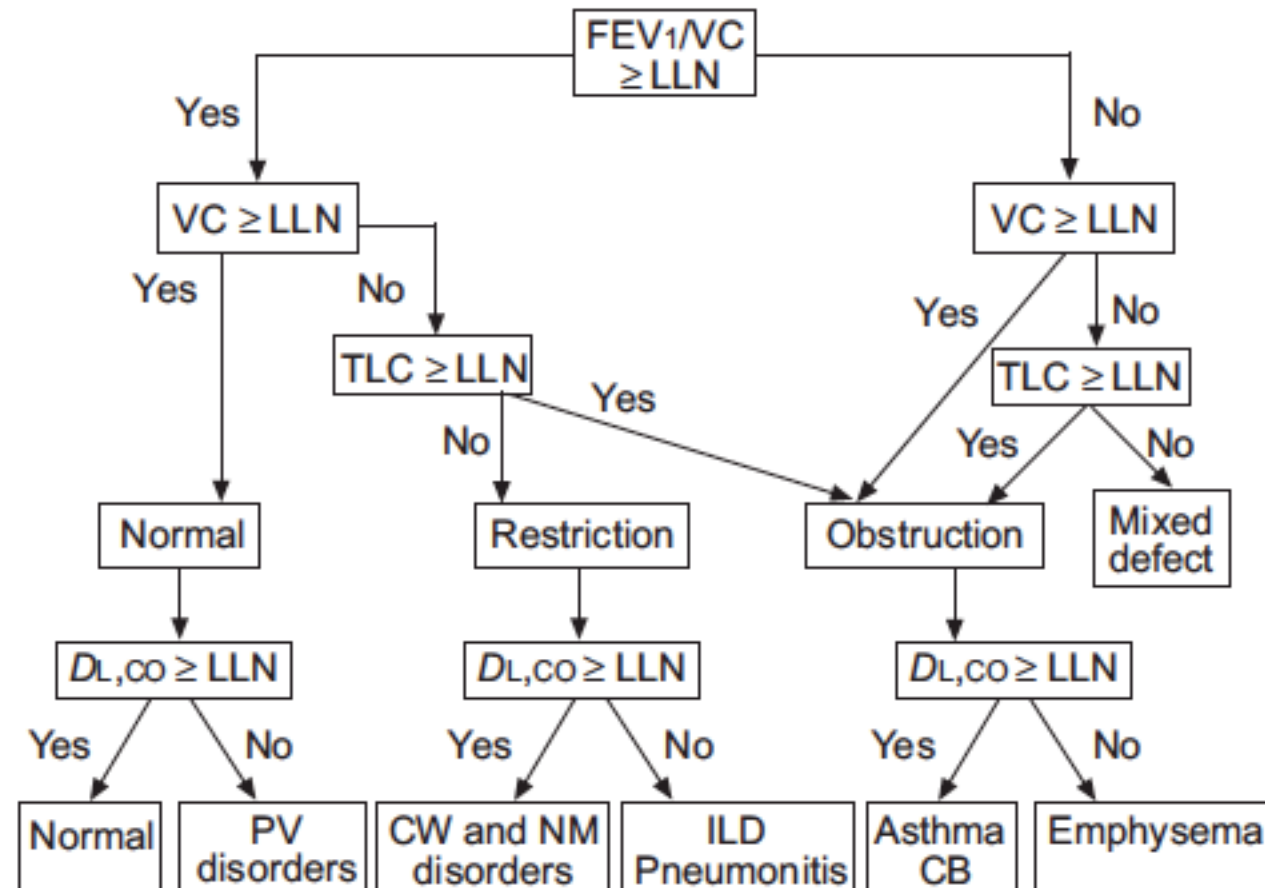
- Changes in lung function *even if they remain within normal limits* can still be pathologic / clinically meaningful
 - Example: 95% predicted \rightarrow 80% predicted



Spirometry interpretation





Interpretation Algorithm





ERS/ATS technical standard on interpretive strategies for routine lung function tests

Sanja Stanojevic ¹, David A. Kaminsky², Martin R. Miller ³, Bruce Thompson⁴, Andrea Aliverti⁵, Igor Barjaktarevic⁶, Brendan G. Cooper⁷, Bruce Culver⁸, Eric Derom⁹, Graham L. Hall¹⁰, Teal S. Hallstrand⁸, Joerg D. Leuppi^{11,12}, Neil MacIntyre¹³, Meredith McCormack¹⁴, Margaret Rosenfeld¹⁵ and Erik R. Swenson^{8,16}

Important Take Home Point:

Recent updates may change the interpretation of your patients' results with ***NO ACTUAL CHANGE*** in the measurement of their lung function

Grading Severity of Impairment:

FEV₁ **Z score** instead of % predicted

OLD: FEV₁ % predicted

NEW: FEV₁ Z score

TABLE 6 Severity of any spirometric abnormality based on the forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV ₁)	
Degree of severity	FEV ₁ % pred
Mild	>70
Moderate	60–69
Moderately severe	50–59
Severe	35–49
Very severe	<35
% pred: % predicted.	

Z-score	Severity
> -1.645	Normal
-1.65 to -2.5	Mild
-2.5 to -4	Moderate
< -4	Severe

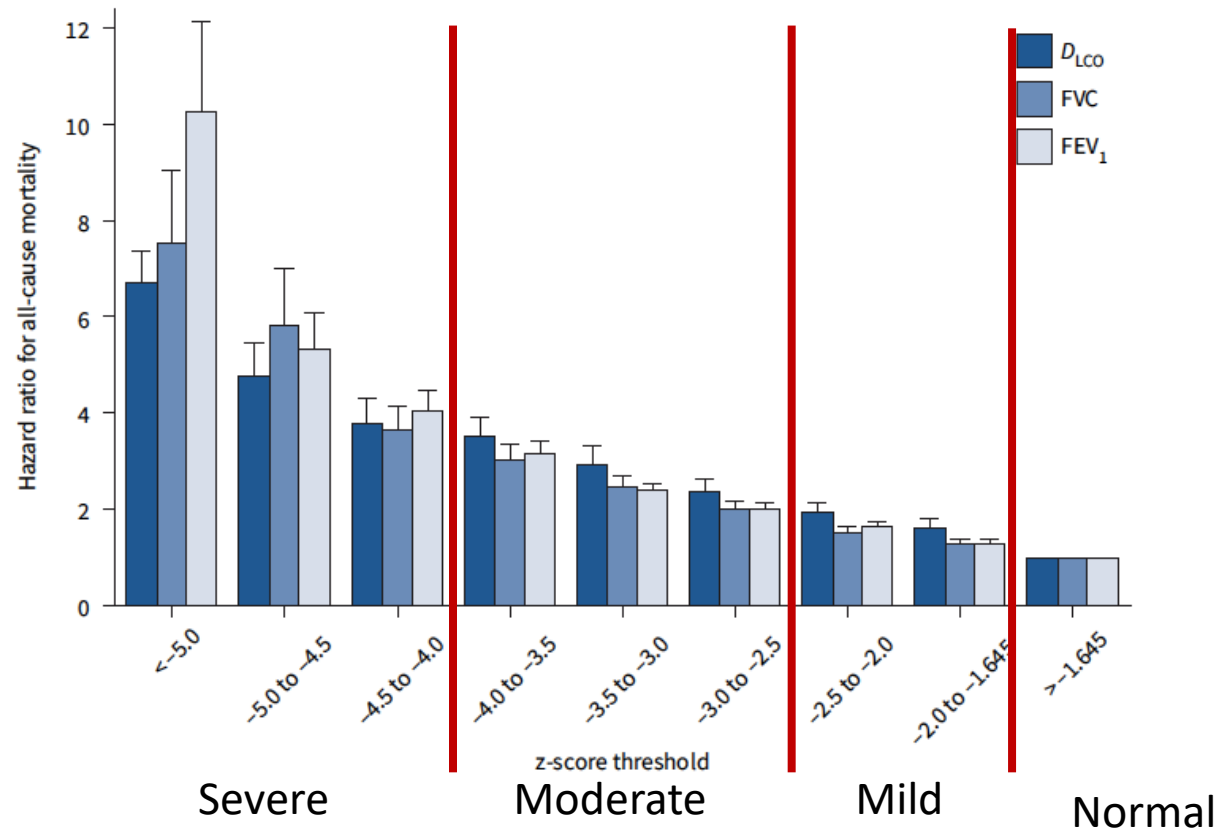
*This also applies for grading severity of diffusing capacity deficit (DLCO)

Severity of physiologic impairment NOT disease severity

Quality of life, functional impairment, symptoms etc.

Lung function and overall mortality

Z score has better correlation with mortality compared to percent predicted



FEV₁ Z score

(NOT FEV₁/FVC, TLC or FVC!)

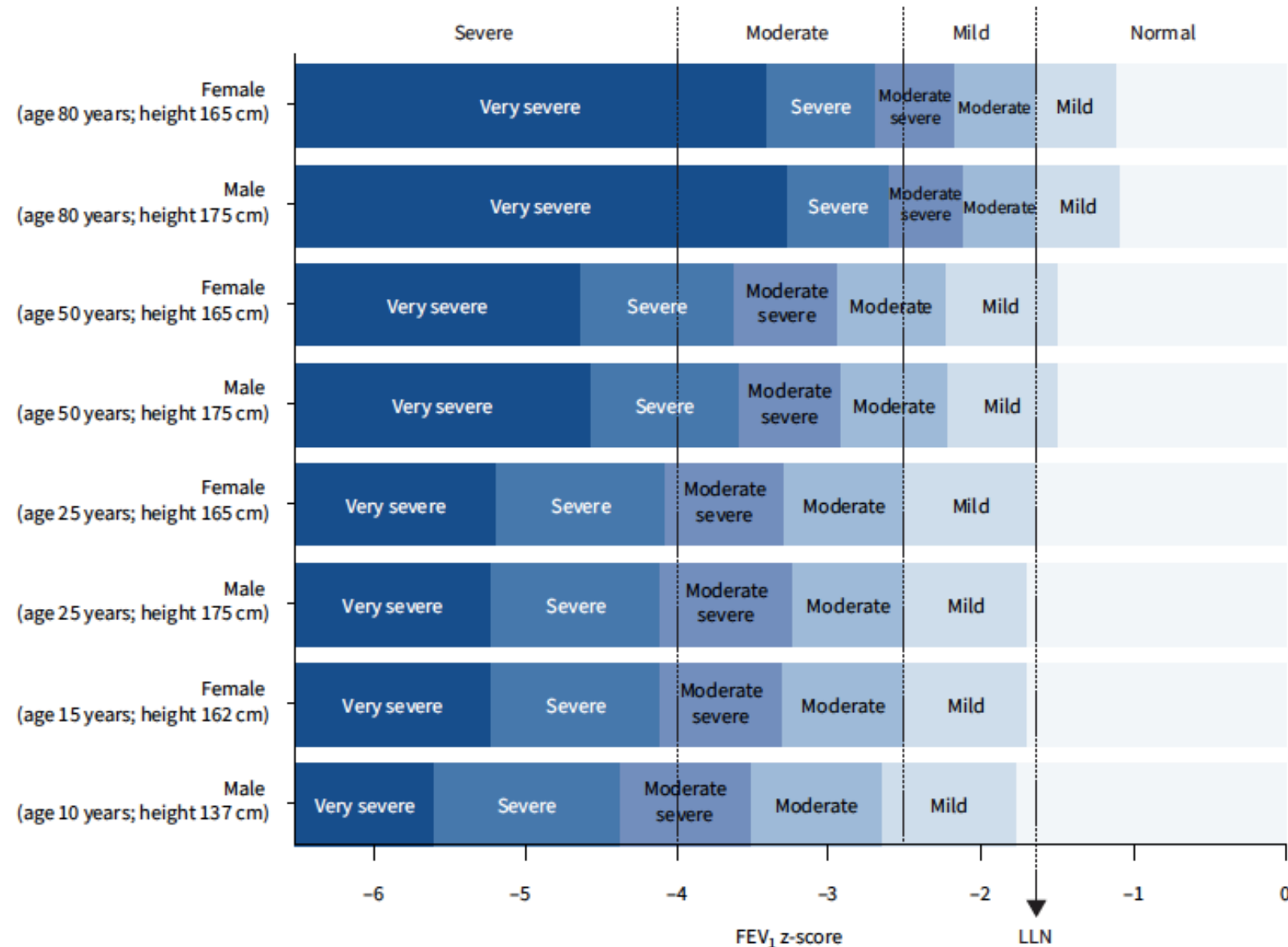
to grade severity

for any type of impairment

(obstruction, restriction, mixed,
non-specific etc.)

How might this affect your patient's results?

- **Older subjects:**
 - results may ↓ in severity
- **Younger subjects**
 - Grouping more stable
 - Mod / mod severe merged

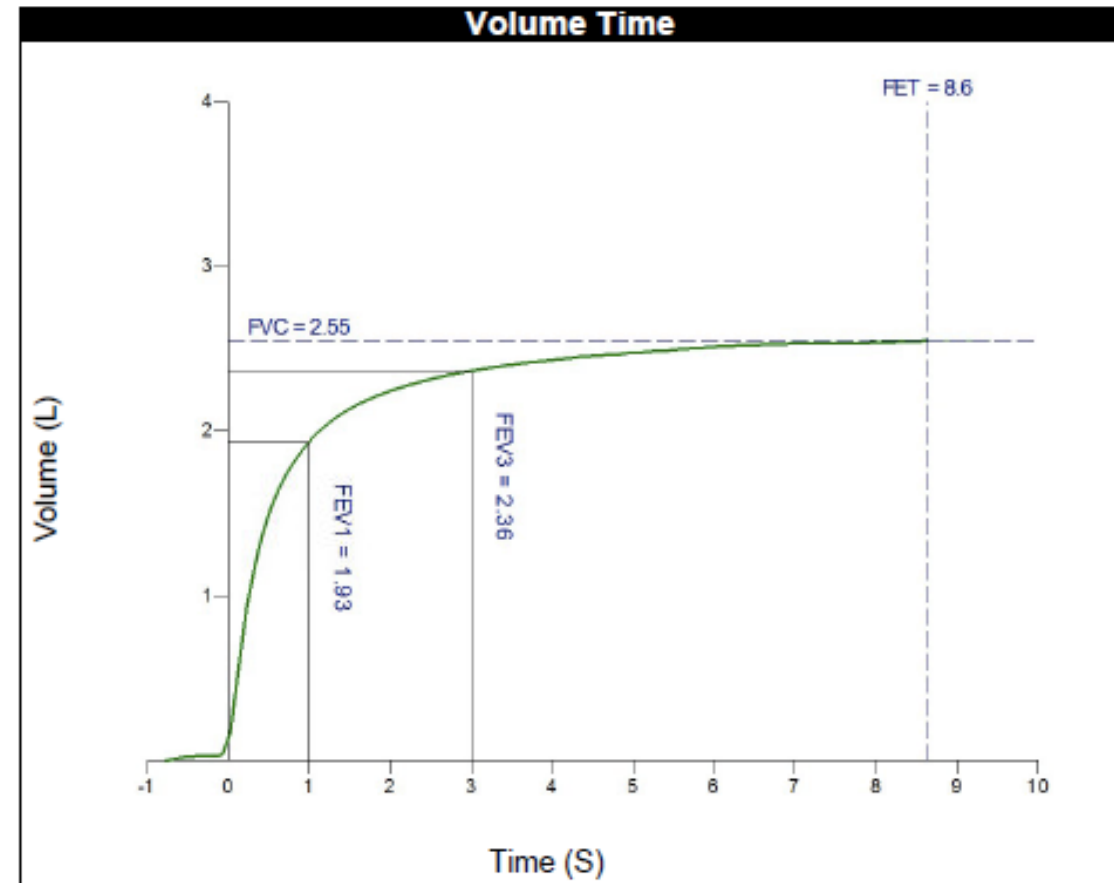
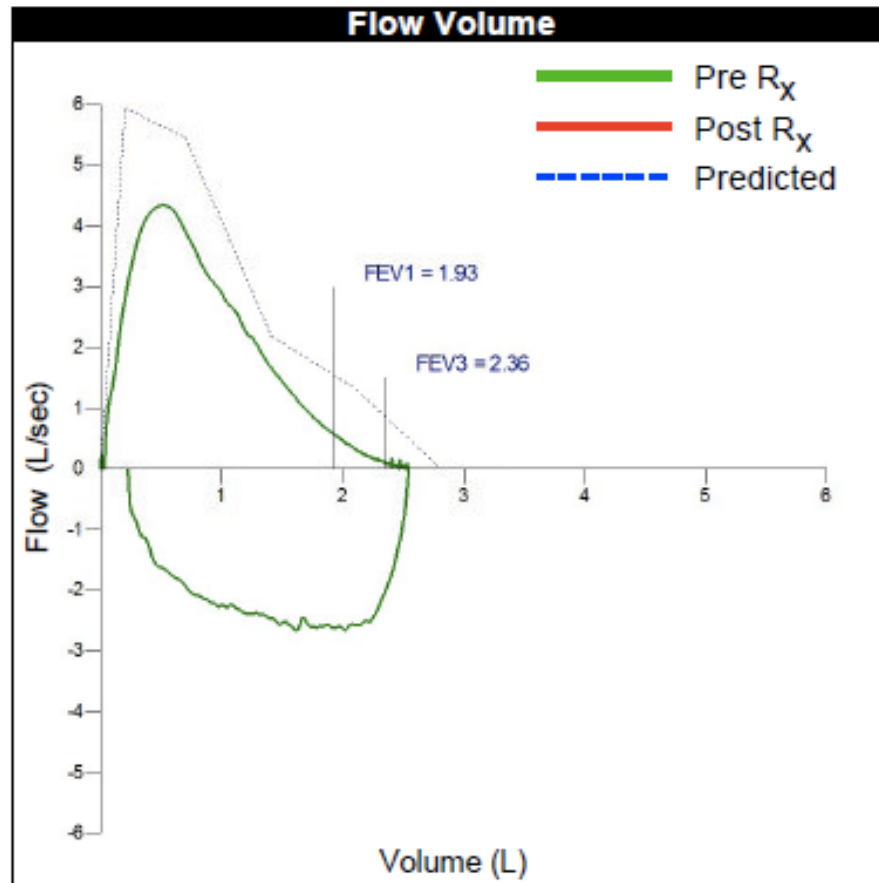


PFT Examples

Example 1

Spirometry (BTPS)		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator	
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred
FVC Effort Time		----	----	15:30	----
FEV ₁	L	2.26	1.70	1.93	85
FVC	L	2.81	2.14	2.55	91
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	81	70	76	94
FEV ₆	L	2.66	1.98	2.51	94
FEV ₁ / FEV ₆	%	83	73	77	93
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅	L/s	2.28	1.09	1.60	70
PEFR	L/s	5.93	3.99	5.31	90
FET	sec	----	----	8.63	----
MWV	L/m	79.9	28.9	----	----

Example 1

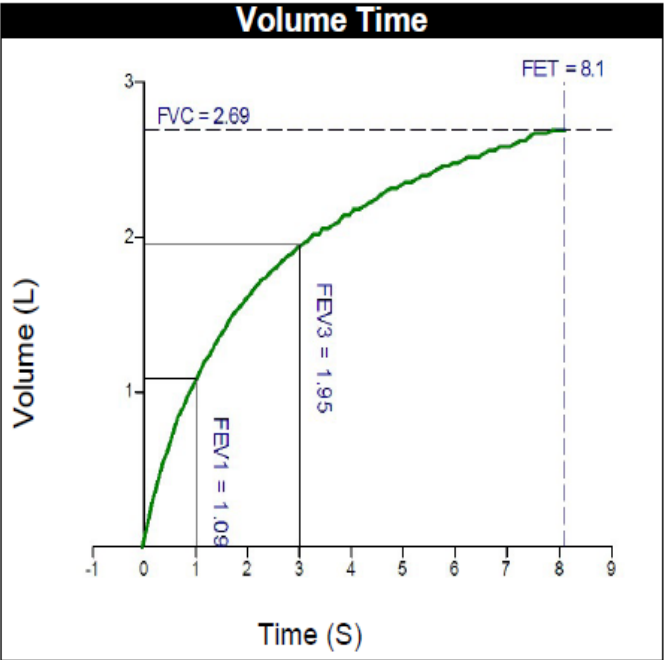
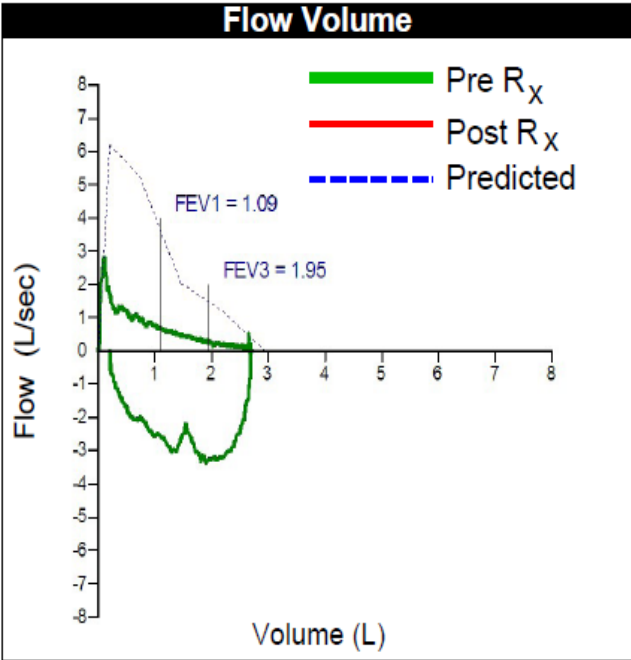
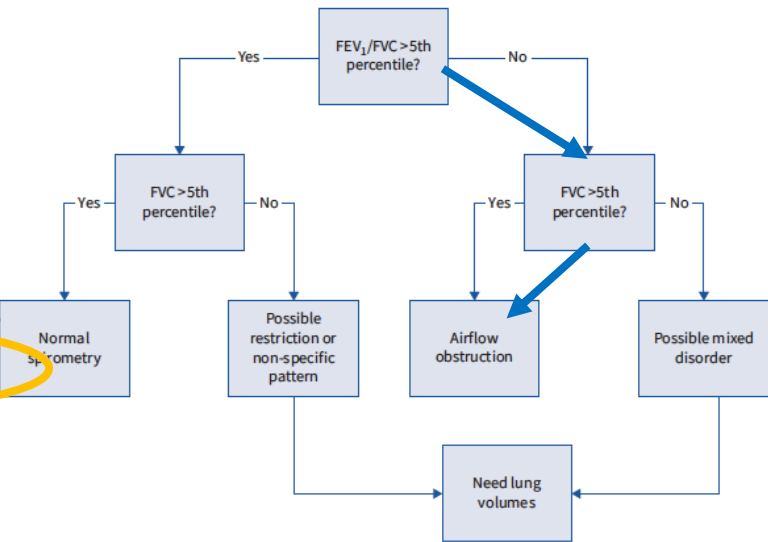


Result: Normal spirometry

Example 2

Spirometry

		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator		
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred	Z score
FEV ₁	L	2.39	1.83	1.09	46	-4.25
FVC	L	2.93	2.25	2.69	92	
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	81	72	41	51	



Z-score	Severity
> -1.645	Normal
-1.65 to -2.5	Mild
-2.5 to -4	Moderate
< -4	Severe

Severe Obstruction

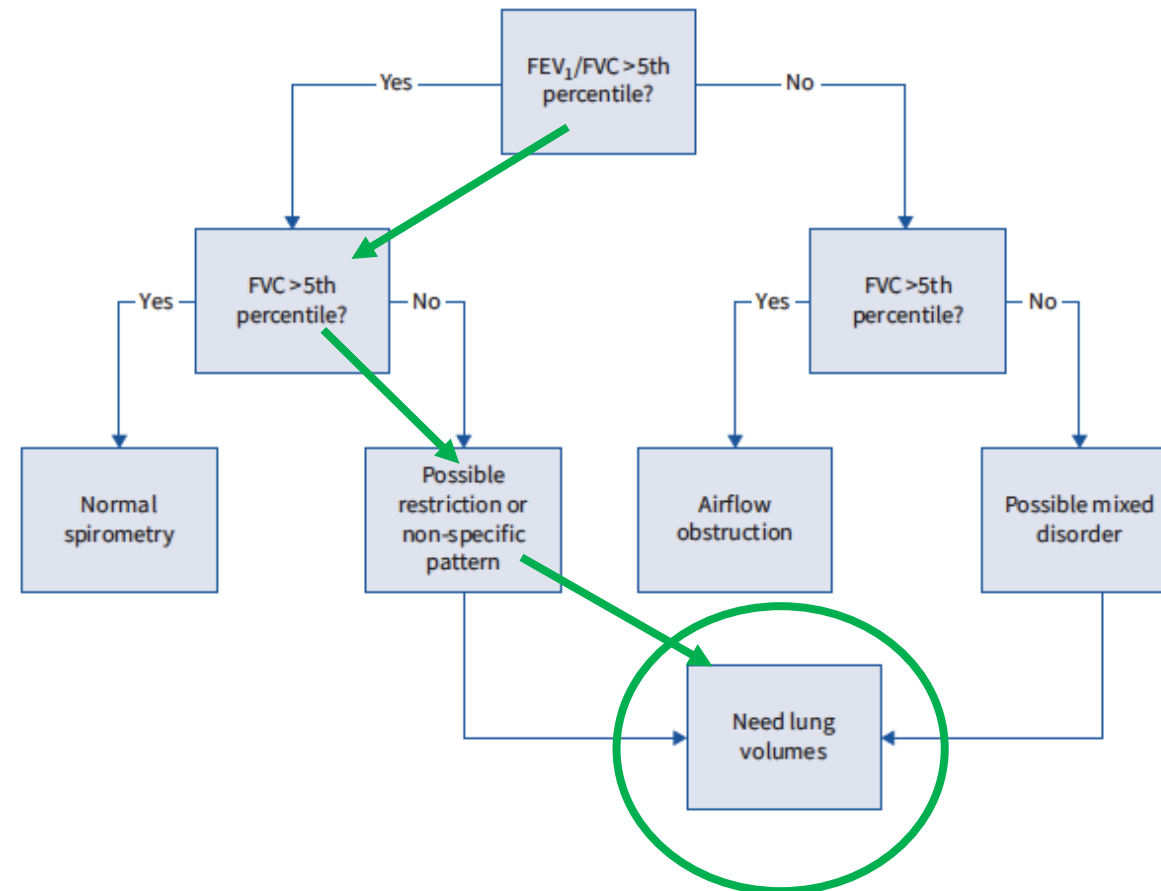
PFT's: define "normal"

- 95% confidence interval / LLN or ULN → Normal vs. Abnormal but....
- Use **FEV₁** Z score → HOW SEVERE impairment is

Example 3

Spirometry

Pre Bronchodilator							
		FVC A	Spirometry Grading				
		FEV1 A					
		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score
FEV ₁	L	1.06	1.48	72	1.01	1.93	-1.48
FVC	L	1.29	1.89	68	1.31	2.50	-1.69
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	82	80	102	68	91	0.27
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅ [ISO]	L/s	1.36	1.33	102	0.56	2.50	---
PEFR	L/s	2.88	3.84	75	2.48	5.20	---
FET	s	10.03	0.00	---	6.00	0.00	---



- Low FVC → need lung volumes

Example 3

- Mild /minimal RESTRICTION
- WITH moderately reduced diffusing capacity

Spirometry

		Pre Bronchodilator							
		FVC A	FEV1 A	Spirometry Grading					
		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score		
FEV ₁	L	1.06	1.48	72	1.01	1.93	-1.48	N	
FVC	L	1.29	1.89	68	1.31	2.50	-1.69	A	m
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	82	80	102	66	91	0.27	N	
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅ [ISO]	L/s	1.36	1.33	102	0.56	2.50	---		
PEFR	L/s	2.88	3.84	75	2.48	5.20	---		
FET	s	10.03	0.00	---	6.00	0.00	---		

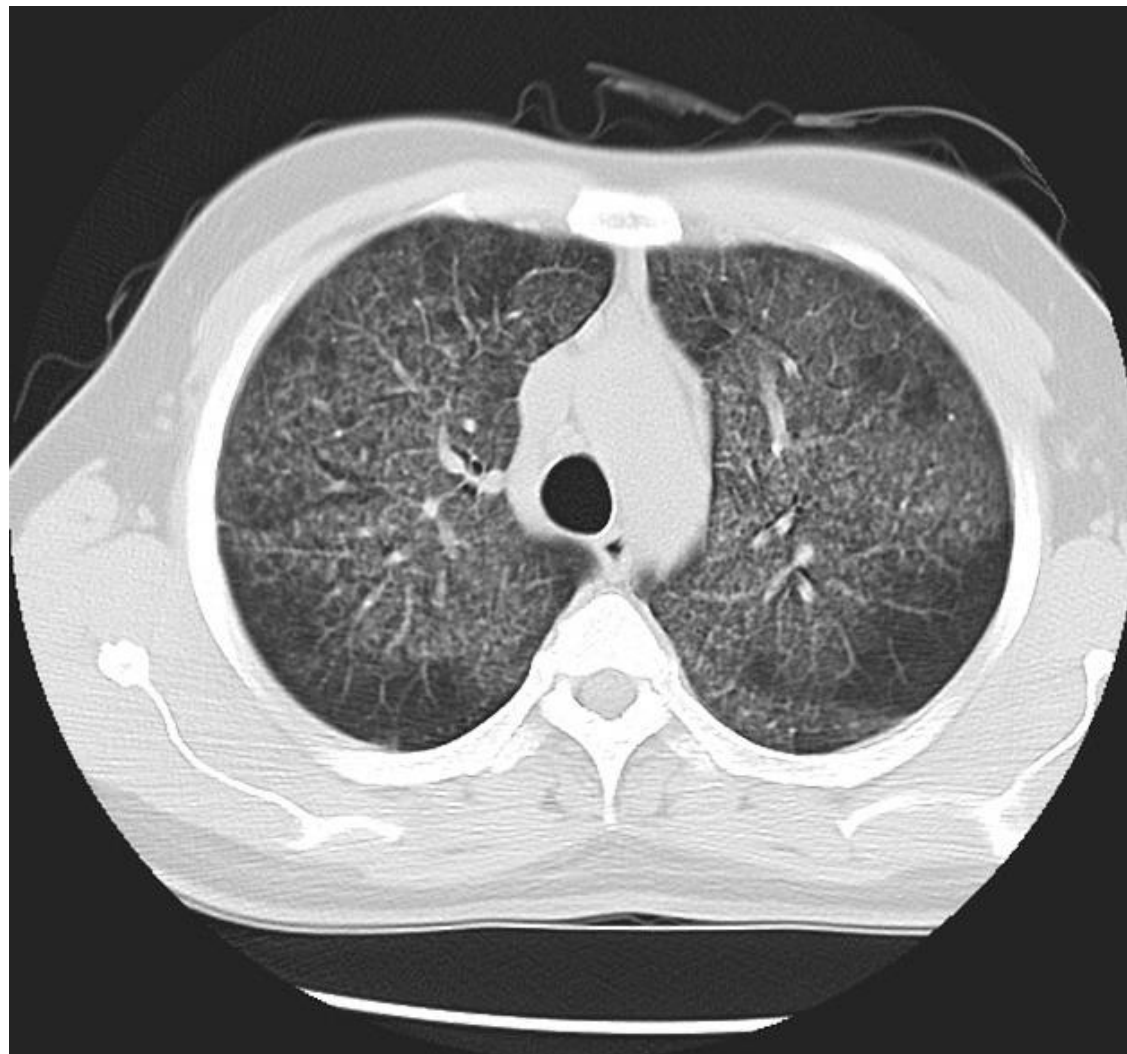
Lung Volumes Box

		Pre Bronchodilator							
		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score		
TLC	L	2.62	3.76	70	2.92	4.72	-2.29	A	m
VC	L	1.37	2.04	67	1.58	2.50	-2.38	A	m
RV	L	1.25	1.70	74	0.98	2.65	-0.97	N	
RV/TLC	%	48	45	107	31	60	0.34	N	
FRC	L	1.27	2.11	60	1.50	2.87	-2.41	A	m
IC	L	1.35	1.52	89	1.00	2.05	-0.53	N	
ERV	L	0.02	0.46	4	0.09	1.07	-2.35	A	m

Diffusing Capacity

		Pre Bronchodilator							
		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score		
DLCO [Unc]	mL/min/mmHg	7.33	15.22	48	11.26	20.15	-3.79	A	M
DLCO [Cor]	mL/min/mmHg	7.92	15.22	52	11.26	20.15	-3.42	A	M
KCO	mL/min/mmHg/L	4.19	4.40	95	3.32	5.62	-0.30	N	
VA [BTPS]	L	1.89	3.46	55	2.74	4.26	-3.88	A	M
VI [BTPS]	L	1.26	2.04	62	1.58	2.50	---		
Diffusion Time	s	9.37	0.00	---	0.00	0.00	---		

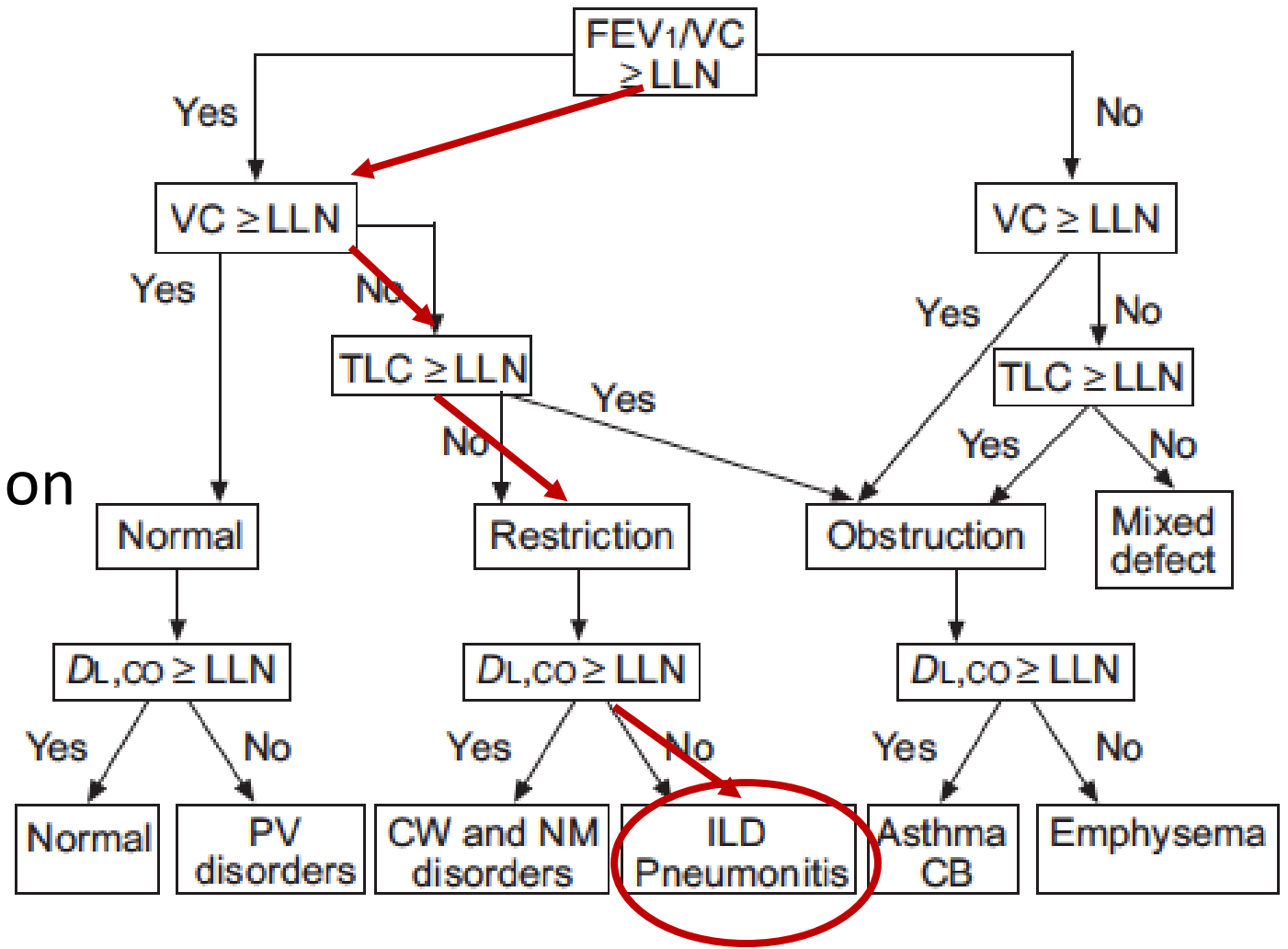
CT scan: NSIP



PFTs in ILD

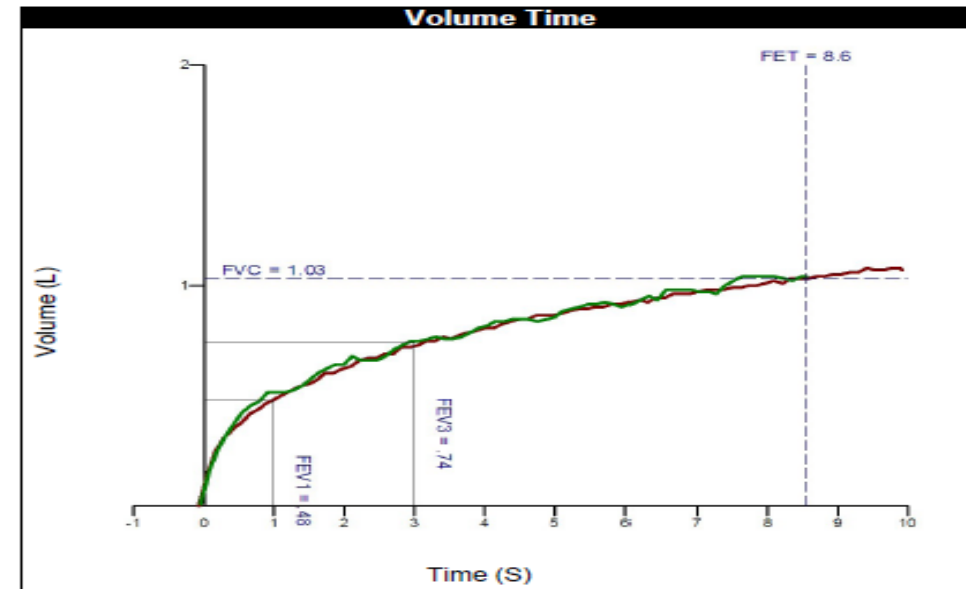
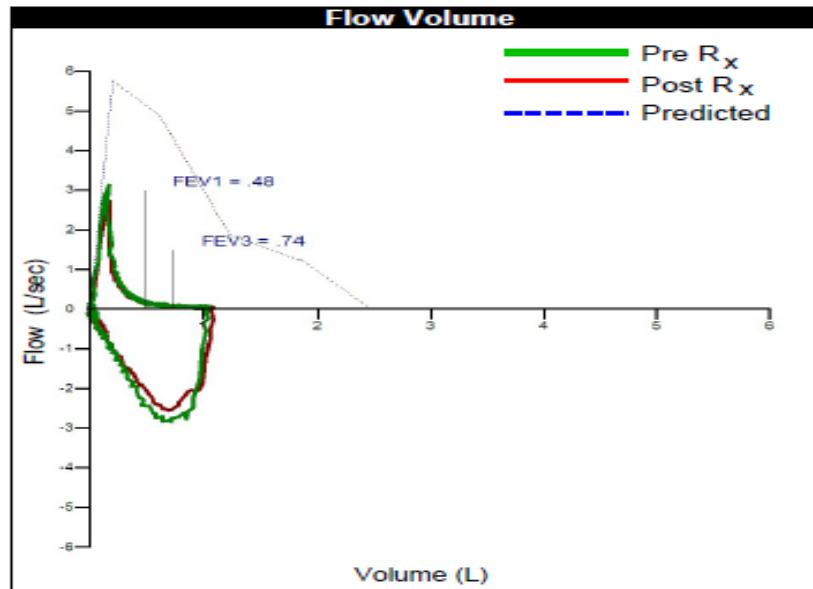
Typical pattern for ILD

- Normal (or high) ratio
- Low FVC → lung volumes!
- Low TLC → confirms restriction
- Low DLCO



Example 4

Spirometry (BTPS)		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator	
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred
FEV ₁	L	2.13	1.57	0.48	23
FVC	L	2.47	1.79	1.03	42
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	85	76	47	55

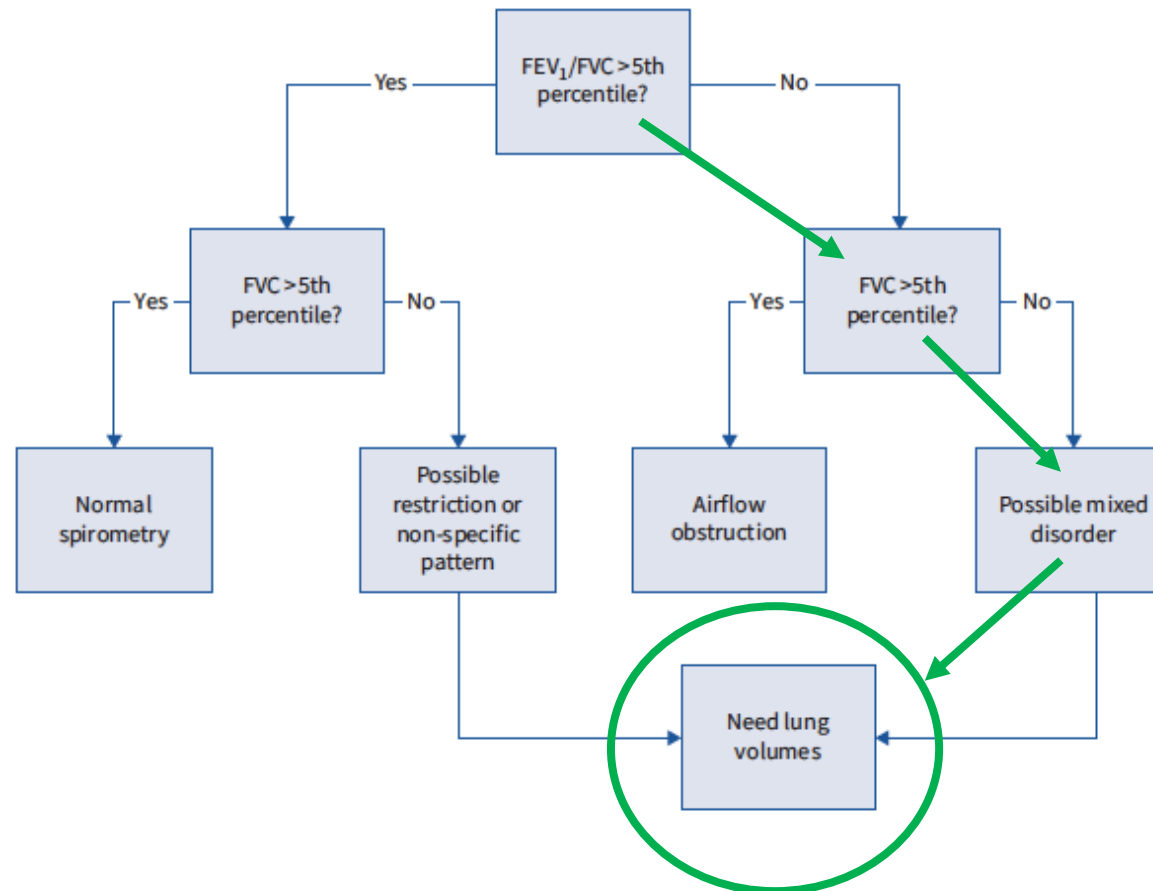


Interpret patient's spirometry result:

Low ratio, Low FEV₁, Low FVC

- A) Obstruction
- B) Restriction
- C) Non-specific respiratory deficit
- D) Obstruction and possible restriction
- E) Combined obstruction and restriction

Low ratio, Low FVC



Interpret patient's spirometry result:

- A) Obstruction
- B) Restriction
- C) Non-specific respiratory deficit
- D) Obstruction and possible restriction
- E) Combined obstruction and restriction

If FVC is low: **lung volumes are necessary** to confirm (or rule out) restriction

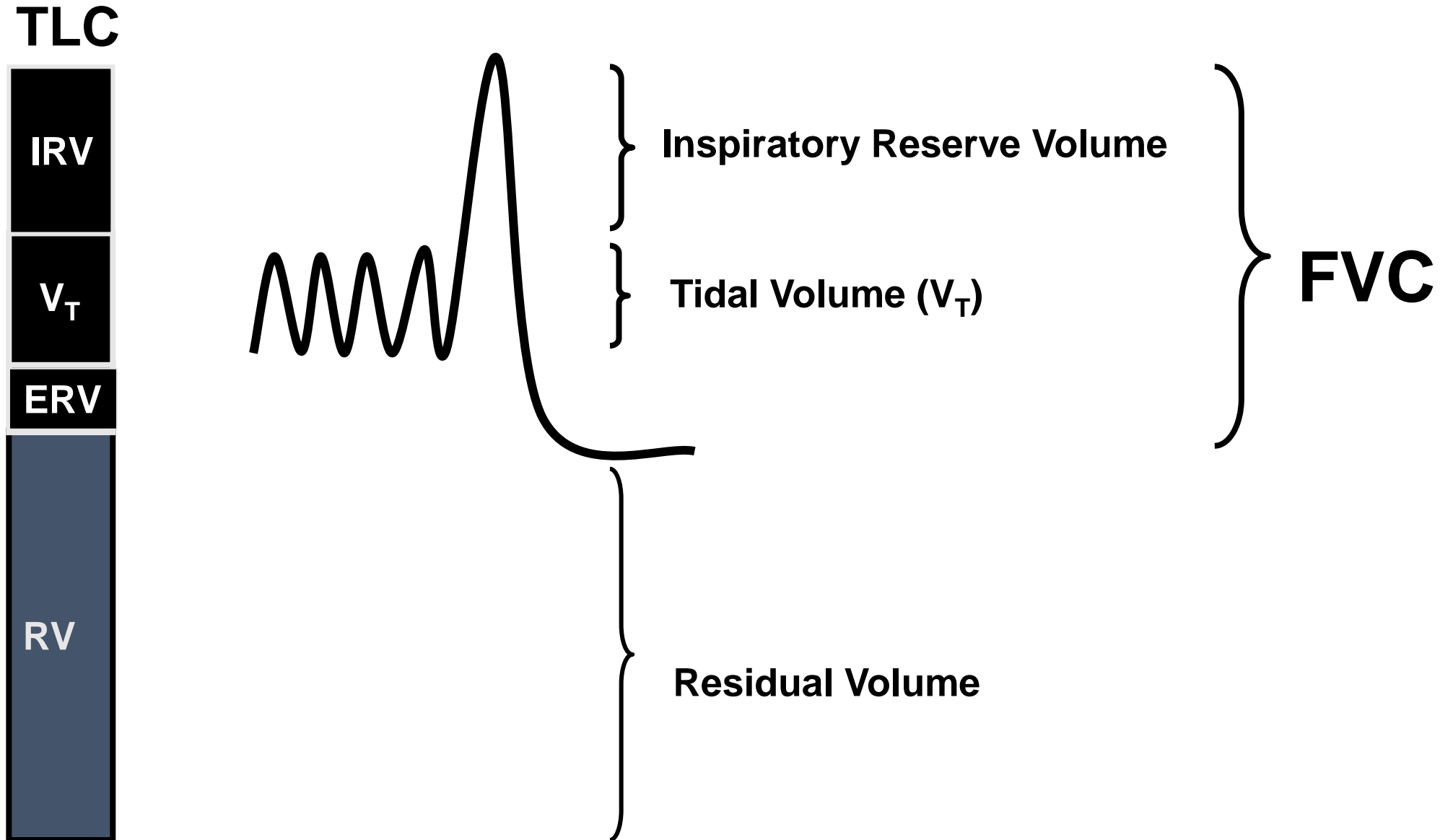
Lung Volumes

Spirometry (BTPS)		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator	
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred
FEV1	L	2.13	1.57	0.48	23
FVC	L	2.47	1.79	1.03	42
FEV1 / FVC	%	85	76	47	55

Lung Volumes (Box)		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator	
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred
TLC	L	4.23	3.15	4.38	104
FRC	L	2.38	1.32	3.76	158
IC	L	1.85	----	0.62	34
ERV	L	0.80	----	0.06	8
RV	L	1.58	0.81	3.70	234
RV/TLC	%	36	25	84	233

- \uparrow RV, RV/TLC $>$ ULN \rightarrow air trapping
- If TLC $>$ ULN \rightarrow hyperinflation (not in this case)

In Obstruction, FVC can be LOW Due to Trapped Gas at End-Exhalation (\uparrow RV)



Interpret patient's full PFT result:

- A) Obstruction *(with air trapping)*
- B) Restriction
- C) Non-specific respiratory deficit
- D) Obstruction and possible restriction
- E) Combined obstruction and restriction

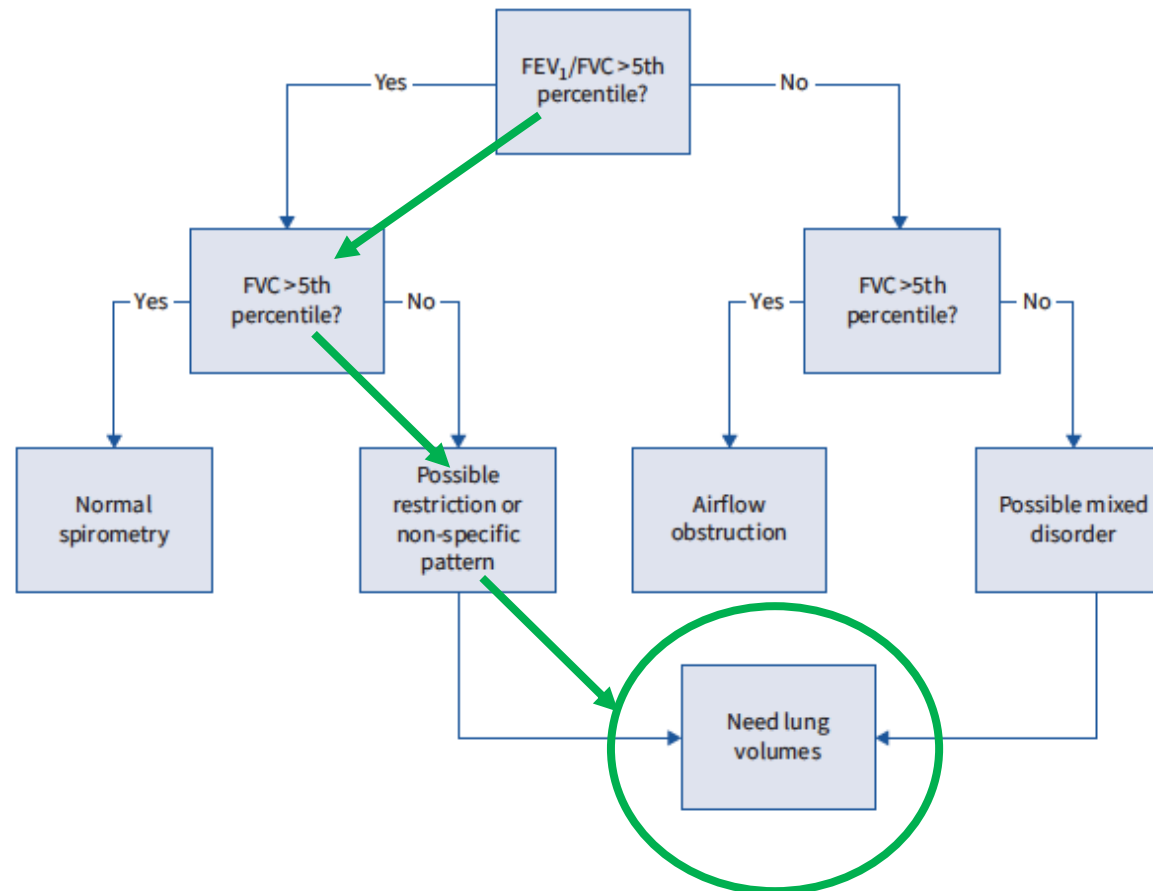
Despite low FVC, **normal TLC rules out restriction**

Example 5

Spirometry (BTPS)		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator	
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred
FVC	Effort Time	----	----	14.29	----
FEV ₁	L	2.36	1.80	1.06	45
FVC	L	2.97	2.29	1.38	46
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	79	70	77	97
FEV ₆	L	3.07	2.41	1.33	43
FEV ₁ / FEV ₆	%	81	72	80	99
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅	L/s	2.39	1.03	0.86	36
PEFR	L/s	6.14	4.48	4.59	75
FET	sec	----	----	9.74	----
MVV	L/m	89.4	38.4	----	----

- Ratio: NORMAL
- FEV₁: low
- FVC: low

Obstruction or Restriction? → Need lung volumes



Lung volumes

Lung Volumes (Box)		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator	
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred
VTG Effort Time		----	----	10:38	----
TLC	L	6.77	5.16	5.49	81
FRC	L	3.54	2.08	3.12	88
IC	L	3.23	----	2.37	73
ERV	L	1.31	----	0.63	48
RV	L	2.23	1.47	2.49	112
RV/TLC	%	33	22	45	136
VC	L	4.54	3.42	3.00	66

- TLC: normal → NOT restriction
- RV, RV/TLC: high = AIR TRAPPING

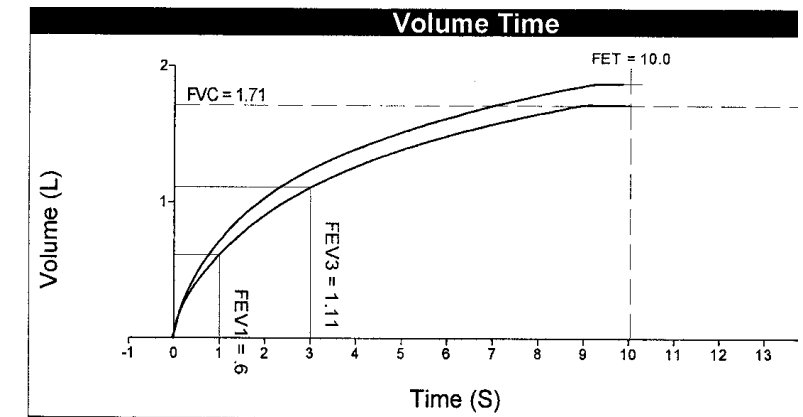
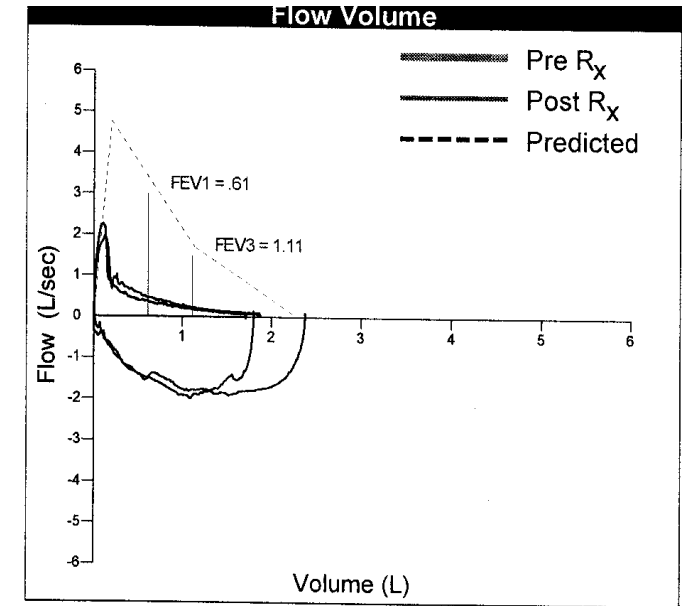
“non-specific” impairment

Reduced FEV_1 and FVC, normal FEV_1/FVC , normal TLC

- Poor effort
 - Failure to inhale or exhale completely “falsely low” FEV_1 and FVC
- Severe Obstruction
 - Flow reduced cannot exhale long enough to get to RV, should appear concave
- Early obstruction
 - Small airway collapse → reduced FVC, increased RV but ratio still normal
- Early restrictive pattern
 - FVC reduction not yet RV reduction
- In current or former smokers
 - Preserved Ratio Impaired Spirometry or PRISm
- 3 year follow up of non-specific pattern
 - 1/3 develop overt obstruction or restriction
 - 2/3 remain with this pattern

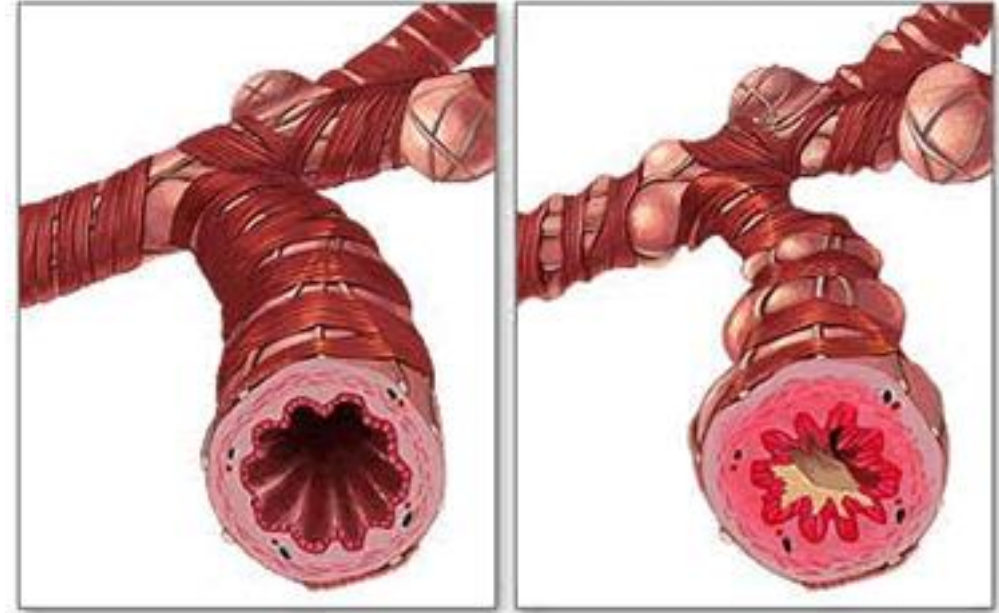
Non-specific pattern: other clues

- Obtain lung volumes
 - → if reduced then restriction
- Look at FV loop, VT curve
 - Concave, failure to reach plateau suggestive of obstruction
 - Air trapping or hyperinflation?
 - RV, RV/TLC, or TLC > ULN
- Compare FVC to SVC
 - $\Delta > 100\text{cc}$: airway collapse during forced exhalation
- Assess BD response
 - If + suggestive of airways disease



Bronchodilator response

- 2-4 puffs albuterol MDI or nebulizer, wait 15 min
- **Hold** short-acting and long-acting bronchodilators 4 hours and 12 hours, respectively, prior to testing



BDR: bronchodilator response

- Old:
 - 12% **AND** 200cc
 - relative to measured baseline FEV₁ or FVC
- New
 - 10% change
 - relative to ***predicted*** value of FEV₁ or FVC
- Minimizes effect of height/age/sex and baseline value in assessing BDR
- Based on studies of healthy subjects showing 10% to be ULN
- Better prediction / separation of subjects with asthma from normal or other lung diseases
- “Over-reliance on strict cut-offs for BDR should be avoided”
 - Not dichotomous trait

BDR: bronchodilator response

- Absolute change expressed as a percentage of predicted value
- >10% considered significant

BOX 1 Determination of a bronchodilator response

$$\text{Bronchodilator response} = \frac{(\text{post-bronchodilator value (L)} - \text{pre-bronchodilator value (L)}) \times 100}{\text{predicted value (L)}^\#}$$

A change of >10% is considered a significant bronchodilator response.

"#": predicted value should be determined using the appropriate Global Lung Function Initiative (GLI) spirometry equation.

For example, a 50-year-old male, height 170 cm, has a pre-bronchodilator forced expiratory volume in 1 s (FEV₁) of 2.0 L and a post-bronchodilator FEV₁ of 2.4 L. The predicted FEV₁ is 3.32 L (GLI 2012 "other" equation).

$$\text{Bronchodilator response} = \frac{(2.4 - 2.0) \times 100}{3.32} = 12.1\%$$

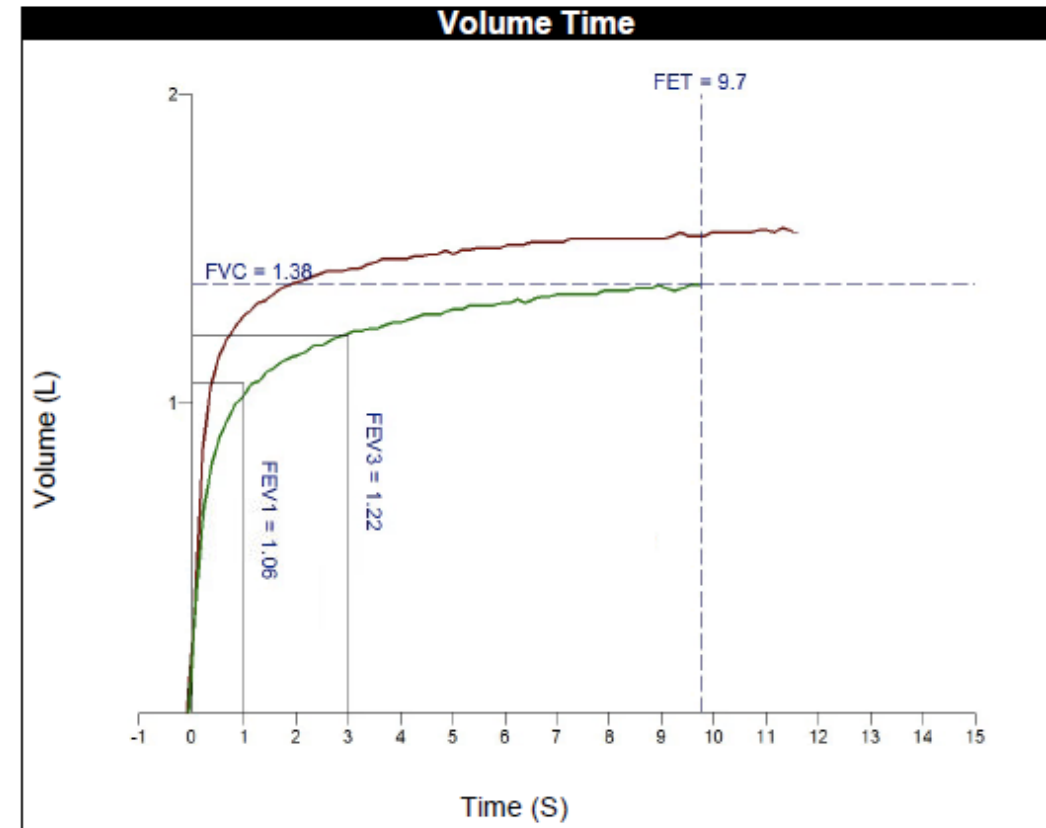
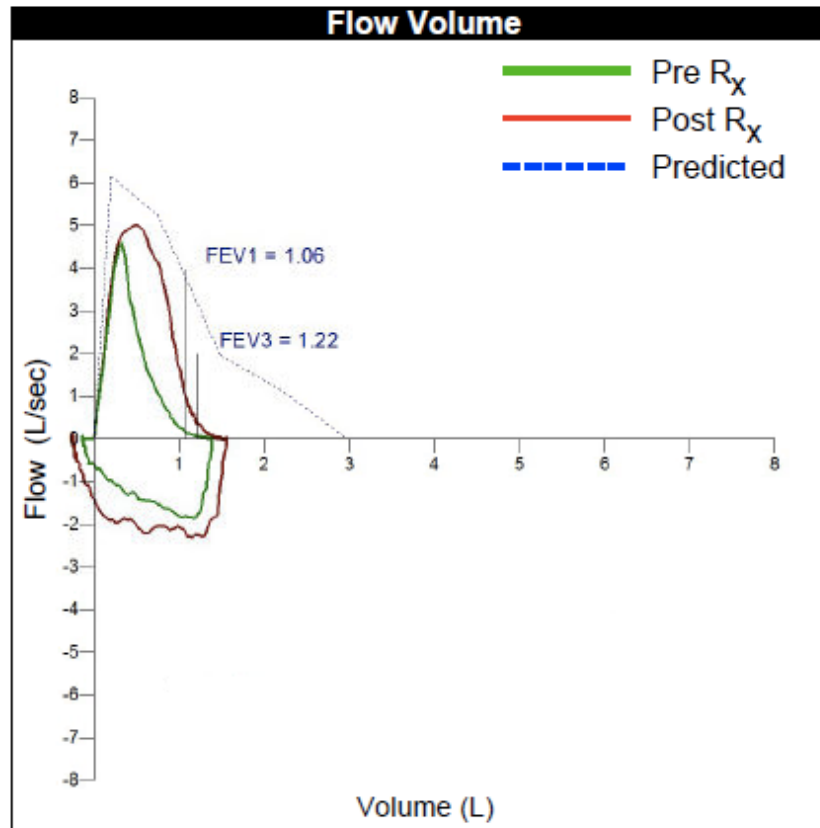
Therefore, their bronchodilator response is reported as an increase of 12.1% of their predicted FEV₁ and classified as a significant response.

Example 5 cont: bronchodilator testing

Spirometry (BTPS)		Predicted Range		Pre Bronchodilator		Post Bronchodilator		Percent Change
		Mean	95%	Actual	% Pred	Actual	% Pred	
FVC Effort Time		----	----	14:29	----	15:29	----	--
FEV ₁	L	2.36	1.80	1.06	45	1.28	54	21
FVC	L	2.97	2.29	1.38	46	1.57	53	14
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	79	70	77	97	82	104	6
FEV ₆	L	3.07	2.41	1.33	43	1.50	49	13
FEV ₁ / FEV ₆	%	81	72	80	99	85	105	6
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅	L/s	2.39	1.03	0.86	36	2.05	86	138
PEFR	L/s	6.14	4.48	4.59	75	6.26	102	36
FET	sec	----	----	9.74	----	11.53	----	18
MVV	L/m	89.4	38.4	----	----	----	----	--

- Old BDR criteria: FEV₁ 220cc and 21% = **YES**
- New BDR criteria: $(1.28 - 1.06) \times 100 / 2.36 = 9.3\%$ **NO... but almost**

FV loop: Bronchodilator response



Example 6

Spirometry

Pre Bronchodilator

		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score		
FEV ₁	L	2.33	2.13	109	1.52	2.71	0.56	N	
FVC	L	3.21	2.78	115	1.99	3.62	0.86	N	
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	73	77	95	64	90	-0.50	N	
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅	L/s	1.74	1.74	100	0.76	3.16	—		
PEFR	L/s	3.84	5.38	71	3.62	7.14	—		

Multiple Breath N2

Pre Bronchodilator

		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score		
TLC	L	4.70	5.09	92	3.99	6.34	-0.58	N	
VC	L	3.21	2.88	111	2.23	3.52	0.85	N	
RV	L	1.49	2.14	70	1.26	3.30	-1.16	N	
RV/TLC	%	32	42	76	29	56	-1.24	N	
FRC	L	—	2.93	—	2.09	4.00	-0.36	N	
IC	L	1.97	2.13	92	1.40	2.85	-0.36	N	

Diffusing Capacity

Pre Bronchodilator

		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score		
DLCO [Unc]	mL/min/mmHg	13.41	19.10	70	14.25	25.13	-1.97	A	m
KCO	mL/min/mmHg/L	3.28	4.07	81	3.09	5.18	-1.31	N	
VA [BTPS]	L	4.10	4.65	88	3.70	5.71	-0.93	N	
VI [BTPS]	L	3.01	2.88	105	2.23	3.52	—		
Diffusion Time	s	9.32	0.00	—	0.00	0.00	—		

This pattern is consistent with any of the following except:

- A) Interstitial lung disease
- B) Emphysema
- C) Neuromuscular weakness
- D) Anemia
- E) Pulmonary hypertension

CT chest



Echocardiogram



Isolated decrease in DLCO

- Emphysema
- Anemia (if not corrected for hemoglobin level)
- Early interstitial lung disease
- Pulmonary edema
- Pulmonary vascular disease (pulmonary hypertension)

NOT neuromuscular disease

Example 7

Spirometry

Pre Bronchodilator

		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score		
FEV ₁	L	1.56	2.76	57	2.11	3.38	-2.97	A	M
FVC	L	2.07	3.50	59	2.68	4.35	-2.93	A	M
FEV ₁ / FVC	%	75	79	95	68	89	-0.60	N	
FEF ₂₅₋₇₅	L/s	1.20	2.52	48	1.33	4.08	-1.87	A	m
PEFR	L/s	7.05	6.79	104	4.96	8.62	---		
FET	s	7.94	0.00	---	6.00	0.00	---		

Lung Volumes Box

Pre Bronchodilator

		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper	Z-Score		
TLC	L	3.53	5.50	64	4.47	6.66	-3.32	A	M
VC	L	2.07	3.74	55	2.95	4.53	-3.44	A	M
RV	L	1.46	1.77	82	1.08	2.68	-0.67	N	
RV/TLC	%	41	32	128	21	43	1.30	N	
FRC	L	1.90	2.92	65	2.07	3.98	-2.04	A	m
IC	L	1.63	2.67	61	1.81	3.54	-1.99	A	m
ERV	L	0.44	0.97	45	0.36	1.87	-1.36	N	

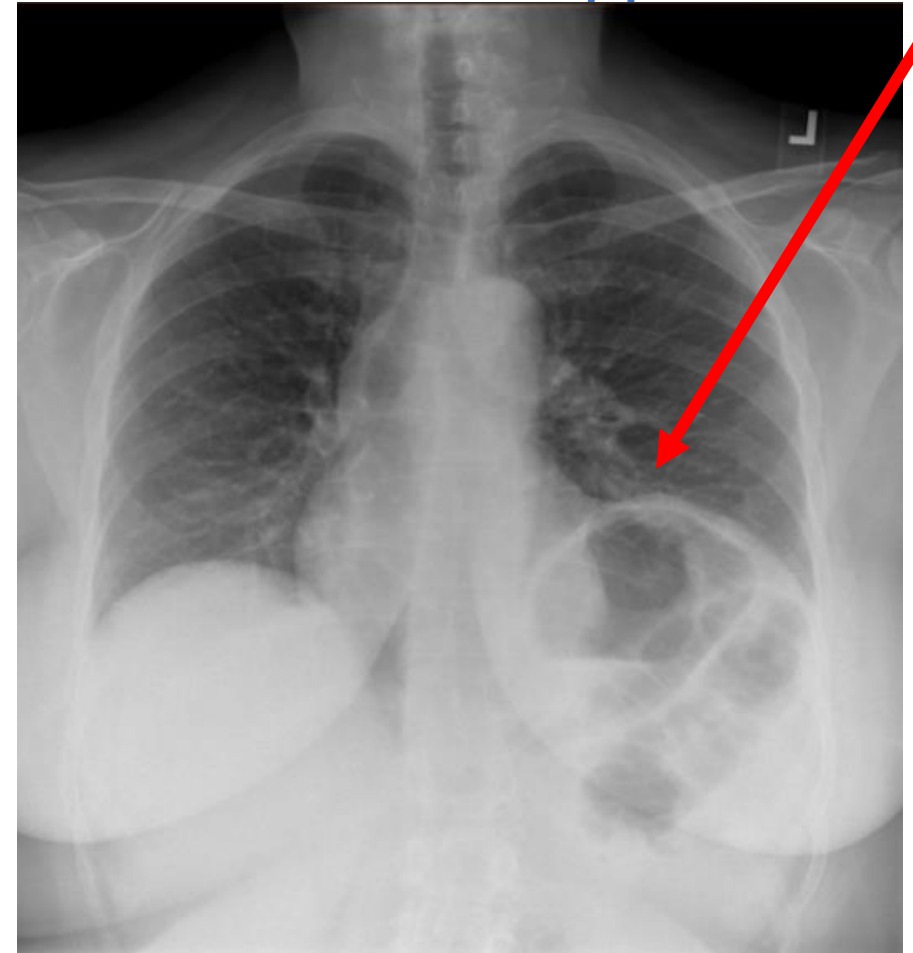
DLCO: normal

Case 3 (cont): Respiratory muscle strength

- MIP: maximal inspiratory pressure
- MEP: maximal expiratory pressure

Respiratory Muscle		Pre Bronchodilator				
		Actual	Pred	% Pred	Lower	Upper
MIP	cmH ₂ O	36	76	47	50	102
MEP	cmH ₂ O	75	96	78	56	136

- MIP: primarily diaphragm
- MEP: intercostal and abdominal muscles



PFT patterns in neuromuscular weakness

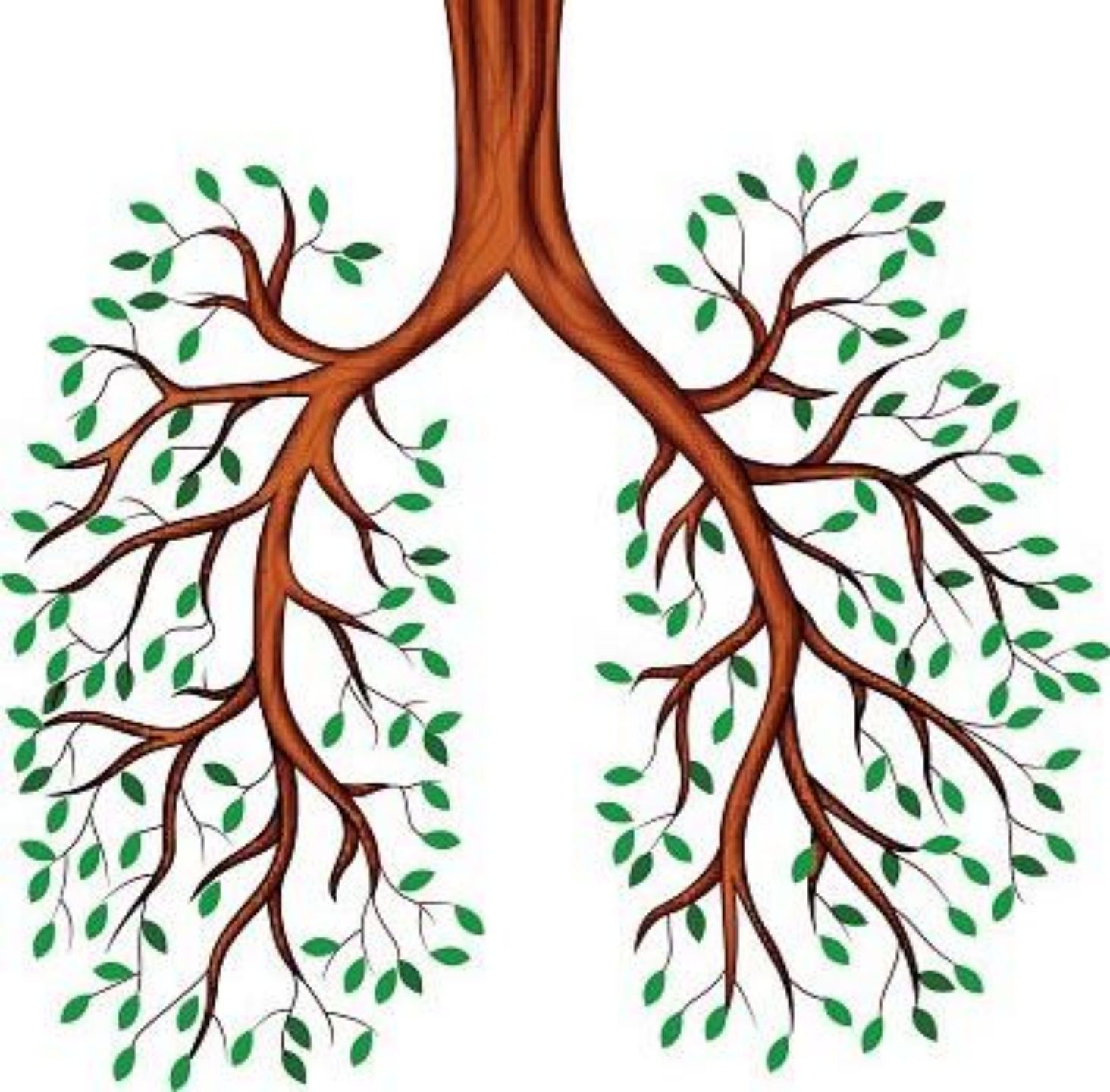
- Restriction
- Normal DLCO
- Not all volumes down the same (vs. ILD)
 - RV, FRC often normal or not as low
 - RV/TLC may be elevated– **NOT due to air trapping** but bc RV is normal while TLC low
- Reduced PEFr (in systemic disorders)
- **FVC**
 - Seated / supine spirometry: 20% decline suggestive of diaphragmatic weakness
 - Often followed over time
 - Used to predict need for nocturnal ventilation (<50%)
 - Daytime ventilation (<20%)

Summary /MOC REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

- PFTs can be very useful in defining physiology in patients with respiratory symptoms
- Use LLN / 95% CI to define normal/abnormal
 - But remember it is a continuum!
- Use FEV_1 to **grade severity** of *ANY* respiratory deficit
- $FEV_1/FVC < LLN$ defines obstruction
 - But can see other patterns in obstructive lung disease
- Consider lung volumes
 - Necessary to define or rule out restriction
 - Delineate other patterns

Selected References

- Pellegrino *et al* ATS/ERS Task force: Interpretive strategies for lung function tests. ERJ 2005;26:948-968
- Stanojevic *et al* ERS/ATS technical standard on interpretive strategies for routine lung function tests. ERJ 2022;60:2101499



Thank you!

Questions? nlange@bwh.harvard.edu