

Prescribing Oscillating Positive Expiratory Pressure (OPEP) Devices (Sheffield)

What is OPEP?

Oscillating Positive Expiratory Pressure (OPEP) devices are used to aid sputum clearance in patients suffering from lung diseases with secretory problems such as COPD, asthma, bronchiectasis and cystic fibrosis. The devices contain a valve or inner ball that creates a resistance and oscillates when the patient blows through the device. This resistance helps splint the airways open during exhalation whilst the oscillation loosens the mucous within the airways. This makes it easier for some patients to clear their sputum, in turn improving dyspnoea, quality of life and exercise capacity. ¹

OPEP devices

There are several different devices available. See [OPEP devices table](#) for further information.

Who should initiate OPEP?

OPEP devices should only be prescribed following recommendation and patient assessment by a physiotherapist specifically trained in the use of the device. They should not be prescribed in response to a direct patient request to a GP as physiotherapist assessment and training is crucial to ensure selection of appropriate patients and maximise benefit from the device. The physiotherapist should specify exactly what is to be prescribed and document the training the patient will receive and details of any review required.

Patients who are housebound can be seen by Integrated Care Team (ICT) Therapy (refer via SPA). Patients at risk of admission can also be referred via SPA (ICT-Therapy or Active Recovery). Patients who have a consultant will be seen by Respiratory Physiotherapy Outpatients at NGH if the consultant deems it necessary.

Please note that currently there is no funded respiratory physiotherapy service for patients who do not have a consultant, are not housebound or not at risk of hospital admission. However, physiotherapists are available at the pulmonary rehabilitation sessions and therefore appropriate patients should be encouraged to attend these sessions.

How are OPEP devices prescribed?

OPEP devices should only be prescribed following recommendation and patient assessment by a physiotherapist specifically trained in the use of the device. Some respiratory physiotherapists are independent prescribers therefore they may prescribe these devices directly to patients. In other cases, and for replacement devices OPEP devices will need to be prescribed by the patients GP at the request of a suitably trained physiotherapist. They do not feature in the BNF but can be found in the Drug Tariff within the appliances section.

Frequency: For prn use. OPEP devices are usually used at least twice daily (morning and evening) but can be used more frequently during periods of infection. A prescription for an OPEP device should be issued acutely and should not be added to repeat prescriptions.

Cleaning and replacement

Cleaning of the device should be as per the manufacturer's instructions.

Replacement schedules for different devices vary. Patients should inspect their device for wear and tear and replace sooner if required if this poses a risk. Please see the [OPEP device table](#) for further information on replacement.

Patient Self Purchase

Some patients may purchase these devices themselves. We do not advocate this, and patients should not use these devices unless they have been assessed and trained by an appropriate health care professional.

Contraindications

- Pneumothorax
- Severe tuberculosis
- Haemoptysis
- Acute heart failure
- Intracranial pressure (ICP) >20 mmHg.
- Known or suspected tympanic membrane rupture or other middle ear pathology.
- Haemodynamic instability.
- Patient tolerance of increased work of breathing (acute asthma, COPD).
- Recent facial, oral, or skull surgery or trauma.
- Acute sinusitis.
- Epistaxis.
- Oesophageal surgery.
- Nausea.
- Endobronchial Valve

Caution

If a patient feels lightheaded, they should take a break and breathe normally until the lightheaded feeling passes.

Annual review





Practice nurses should be informed if a patient has an OPEP device so that this can be addressed at the patient's annual review. At the review the patient should be asked if they are still using the device. Whether it is still fit for purpose (do they need a new one?) and whether they need any further support for using their device. If further support is required, the patient should be referred via the appropriate route if eligible ([as documented above](#)) or referred back into pulmonary rehabilitation.

1. S. Svenningsen, G. Paulin, A. Wheatley, D. Pike, J. Suggett, D. McCormack, G. Parraga: Oscillating positive expiratory pressure (oPEP) therapy in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and bronchiectasis; *European Respiratory Journal* 2014 44: P3679

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OPEP devices				
Device	Cost	PIP code	Replacement interval	Additional information
<p>Acapella® Choice Blue (formally Acapella)</p>  <p><i>Search "Acapella" in clinical system</i></p>	£40.50	388-4996	6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Magnetic rocker can corrode over time due to cleaning, important to check the device regularly and replace in case of rusting to the magnetic element • Resistance / Frequency variable – settings ingrained into dial at end of device • Mechanism not gravity dependent meaning device can be used in combination with postural drainage in any postural set • Can be used in combination with a nebuliser (requires adapter)
<p>Aerobika</p>  <p><i>Search "Aerobika" in clinical system</i></p>	£45.50	406-0067	12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All plastic in construction means more durable over time • Resistance / Frequency variable via lever at front of device • Mechanism not gravity dependent meaning device can be used in combination with postural drainage in any postural set • Can be used in combination with a nebuliser (requires adapter)
<p>Flutter</p>  <p><i>Search "Flutter" in clinical system</i></p>	£40.50	253-2190	Not specified by manufacturer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravity dependent mechanism means device can only be used in sitting – this means the device cannot be combined with any postural drainage techniques • Positioning of device needs to be very specific for adequate function – risk of user error • Single frequency
<p>Pari O-PEP</p>  <p><i>Search "Pari" in clinical system</i></p>	£27.28		6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gravity dependent mechanism means device can only be used in sitting – this means the device cannot be combined with any postural drainage techniques • Positioning of device needs to be very specific for adequate function – risk of user error • Single frequency