

Breathe Easy

Living with Asthma



Harvard Pilgrim
Health Care

Got Asthma?

You're Not Alone!

About 25 million people in the U.S. have asthma. But having asthma doesn't have to limit what you can do. With education and treatment, asthma symptoms and flare-ups (attacks) can be controlled so that you can maintain good lung function and your normal activity level.

With Good Asthma Control You Can...

- Participate in activities you enjoy like sports, fitness classes or dance.
- Get an uninterrupted night's sleep.
- Miss fewer days of work or school.
- Live a healthy and active life.

A person who sleeps well can be more productive throughout the day. If you wake up at night, coughing a lot, your asthma may not be in control.



What is Asthma?

Asthma is a disease of the lungs. It's a chronic (long-term) condition which affects your airways. Asthma causes the airways to narrow, swell and make extra mucous. This makes it hard for air to get in and out.

People with asthma also have very sensitive airways that react to many different things in the environment known as **asthma triggers**. Coming in contact with your asthma trigger(s) can cause **asthma symptoms** (coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and chest tightness) or a flare-up (more frequent and worsening of symptoms).

Know your asthma symptoms and complete an Asthma Action Plan with your health care provider. Acting early when symptoms first appear can prevent them from getting worse.

What Can You Do About Your Asthma Triggers?

Below are common triggers and what you can do to avoid them.



Dust, Dust Mites

- Dust with a damp cloth and vacuum (use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter or wear a dust mask) at least once a week.
- Use allergen or impermeable dust-proof zippered covers on mattresses and pillows.
- Wash sheets and blankets at least once a week in hot water (130 degrees fahrenheit).



Cats, Dogs or Other Animals

- Keep pets out of sleeping areas.
- Keep the doors to bedrooms closed.
- Keep pets off upholstered furniture or vacuum upholstered furniture at least once a week.
- Avoid products made with feathers (for example, pillows and comforters).



Cockroaches, Mice & Rats

- Don't leave food or garbage out.
- Clean up spills and store food in airtight containers.
- Keep food out of the bedrooms.
- Avoid bug sprays which can trigger flare-ups. Use baits or traps instead.





Mold

- Use exhaust fans or open windows when cooking or showering.
- Fix leaky plumbing or other unwanted sources of water.
- Replace any moldy ceiling tiles or carpet.
- Use a dehumidifier in damp basement areas.



Pollen, Outdoor Mold or Changes in Weather or Seasons

- If you have allergies, know what months are worst for you and plan ahead.
- Keep windows closed during pollen season and when mold counts are high.
- Visit weather.com/allergy and check out the outdoor allergy tracker for pollen, mold and breathing conditions in your area.



Tobacco Smoke

- If you smoke, quit.
- Until you quit, do not smoke in the house or car and don't let anyone else do so.
- Encourage household members to quit smoking, or smoke outside.
- For free telephone counseling, call 800-QUIT NOW (800-784-8669) or visit smokefree.gov for other quit smoking programs.

Think about things that trigger your asthma and try to avoid them.

If you have allergies you may need to take allergy medicine. Controlling your allergies may help control your asthma.



Asthma Medicines

Asthma is commonly treated with two types of medicines:

Controllers are used every day to prevent and keep asthma symptoms in control.

Relievers are used as needed for quick relief of asthma symptoms.



Controllers

What do controllers do?

- Reduce irritation, swelling and mucus in the airways.
- Help prevent asthma symptoms.
- Help the lungs stay healthy and strong.

When should I use my controller?

Every day as directed by your health care provider. These medicines take time to work but over time you will have fewer asthma symptoms.

What are some examples of controller medicines?

- Flovent[®] (fluticasone)
- Advair[®] (fluticasone/salmeterol)
- Singulair[®] (montelukast)
- Theophylline

What controller medicine are you taking? _____

Not taking one? Ask your health care provider if you need one.

Relievers

What do relievers do?

- Relax the muscles around the airways.
- Work right away for quick relief of asthma symptoms.

When should I use my reliever?

- When you are having asthma symptoms or a flare-up.
- Before exercise or activity, if directed by your health care provider.

What are some examples of reliever medicines?

- ProAir[®] HFA (albuterol)
- Xopenex[®] HFA (levalbuterol)
- Ventolin[®] HFA (albuterol)

What reliever medicine are you taking? _____

Do you need to use your reliever medicine more than two days per week? If so, your asthma may not be in control. Contact your health care provider to discuss.

Think about when you use your asthma medicines, does it make you feel better, worse or no different? Discuss this with your health care provider.

Even if you feel well, it is important to take your controller medicine every day as instructed by your health care provider.

If your medicine is making you feel bad, you may be having a side effect and may need to change to a different medicine. Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist.

Ask your health care provider or pharmacist about a spacer for your inhaler. A spacer gets more medicine in your lungs so less gets on the inside of your mouth.

Always carry your reliever medicine with you for quick relief of asthma symptoms.

Make sure you always have enough asthma medicine. Refill prescriptions before you run out. Ask your health care provider about a 90-day prescription of your medicines.



Questions to Ask Your Health Care Provider

Q Do I need a flu or pneumonia shot?

It is recommended that everyone with asthma get a flu vaccine to protect against getting the flu. If you are over 19 years old you may also need a pneumonia vaccine.

Q Should I use a peak flow meter?

A peak flow meter measures how well air moves out of your lungs. Peak flow meters can help you:

- Recognize if your asthma is getting worse, even before any symptoms appear.
- Know when to take or adjust your medicines.

Q Can you help me develop my asthma action plan?

An asthma action plan can help you understand:

- When to take your medicines.
- What to do if you have asthma symptoms or if your asthma symptoms change.
- When to see your health care provider or to seek emergency care.

Q Am I using my asthma inhaler correctly?

Incorrect technique when taking inhaled medicines can prevent you from getting the full benefit of the medicine and can make your asthma symptoms and control worse.



Asthma Action Plan

Fill out this action plan with your doctor or nurse at your next visit

Your Name	Your Emergency Contact Name and Telephone Number
Your Doctor's Name	Your Doctor's Telephone Number

Your Personal Best Peak Flow: _____

Date of Action Plan: _____

GREEN ZONE – No symptoms: You're doing well!

You are doing well:

- Breathing is good
- No coughing or wheezing
- Sleeping through the night
- Can do usual activities

Peak flow

From: _____ To: _____
80% to 100% of personal best

Medicine	How much	How often
C Controller or R Reliever		
C		
R		

Actions:

- Take your controller medicine(s) every day as directed by your doctor.
- Take your reliever medicine _____ minutes before exercise.

YELLOW ZONE – Caution: Your asthma is not in control.

You may have any of these:

- Mild wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing
- Waking at night with symptoms

Peak flow

From: _____ To: _____
50% to 79% of personal best

Actions:

- Inhale _____ puff(s) of your reliever medicine every _____ minutes for up to _____ hours. Or use nebulizer _____.

If your symptoms don't get better (or your peak flow has not returned to the green zone) in 1 hour then:

- Use your reliever medicine. Inhale _____ puff(s) every _____ hours.
- Add your oral steroid tablets _____.
Take _____ mg _____ times a day for _____ days.
- Call your doctor within _____ hours after taking your oral steroid tablets.

RED ZONE – Medical Alert: Get help right away!

You may have **any** of these:

- Breathing is hard and fast
- Very short of breath
- Using chest and neck muscles to breathe
- Difficulty walking and talking
- Fingernails or lips are blue

Peak flow

Below: _____
Less than 50% of personal best

Actions:

- Use your reliever medicine **NOW!**

- Inhale _____ puffs or use nebulizer _____.
- Take oral steroid tablets _____ mg.
- Call your doctor **NOW!**
- Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you cannot reach your doctor. **DO NOT WAIT!**

Are Your Asthma Symptoms in Control?

The Asthma Control Test™ (below) is a quick way to help you and your health care provider determine if your asthma symptoms are well controlled. Take this test and share the results with your health care provider.

1. In the past 4 weeks, how much of the time did your asthma keep you from getting as much done at work, school or at home?

- (1) All of the time
- (2) Most of the time
- (3) Some of the time
- (4) A little of the time
- (5) None of the time

2. During the past 4 weeks, how often have you had shortness of breath?

- (1) More than once a day
- (2) Once a day
- (3) 3 to 6 times a week
- (4) Once or twice a week
- (5) Not at all

3. During the past 4 weeks, how often did your asthma symptoms (wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, chest tightness or pain) wake you up at night or earlier than usual in the morning?

- (1) Four or more nights a week
- (2) 2 or 3 nights a week
- (3) Once a week
- (4) Once or twice
- (5) Not at all

4. During the past 4 weeks, how often have you used your rescue inhaler or nebulizer medication (such as albuterol)?

- (1) Three or more times per day
- (2) 1 or 2 times per day
- (3) 2 or 3 times per week
- (4) Once a week or less
- (5) Not at all

5. How would you rate your asthma control during the past 4 weeks?

- (1) Not controlled at all
- (2) Poorly controlled
- (3) Somewhat controlled
- (4) Well controlled
- (5) Completely controlled

Write the number of each answer in the score box provided then add up the score boxes to the total. If your score is 19 or less, there may be more that you and your health care provider can do to control your asthma. No matter what your score, share the results with your health care provider.

Add up your score!

1. ____ 2. ____ 3. ____ 4. ____ 5. ____ Total =

Still Have Questions?

- Call our nurses at 866-750-2068 Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (TTY service: 711)
- Visit The American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology at aaaai.org for:
 - Up-to-date asthma information
 - Videos on how to use an inhaler
 - Quizzes and tools such as an asthma action plan
 - Online support

