
This information is formatted in 14 point font for readers with low vision. Additional accessible formats are available... ask your doctor or medical assistant.

What is asthma?

When you have asthma the airways in your lungs are inflamed and very sensitive. The airways are the tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. Many things can trigger your asthma and cause symptoms. Asthma does not go away when symptoms go away. Treatment is the key to keeping your asthma under control. Work with your provider to develop a treatment plan that's right for you. This can help you reduce symptoms. Asthma cannot be cured, but it can be controlled.

What is an asthma episode or attack?

The words “asthma episode or attack” are used to describe what happens when the lungs react to a certain “trigger”. The airways in the lungs become narrow so less air flows through. This narrowing is caused by:

- **Tightening of muscles around the airways**
- **Swelling of the airways**
- **Clogging of the airways by mucous plugs**

Breathing becomes difficult. It feels like trying to breathe through a straw. In a severe asthma attack the airways can close enough to stop your breathing. Using your asthma medicines will help you prevent asthma attacks.

What are the signs of an episode or attack?

Signs may be different for every person, but the most common signs are:

- A feeling of tightness in the chest
- Coughing which gets worse at night
- Wheezing (a whistling sound when breathing)
- Trouble breathing
- Some people vomit when they have an episode

Asthma episodes can be scary. Act quickly to prevent asthma episodes from getting worse.

What medicine is used to treat asthma?

There are different kinds of medicine to treat asthma. Some medicines are taken by mouth and others are inhaled. Often more than one medicine is needed.

There are two main types of asthma medicines:

Quick-relief or Rescue Medicines - these are used at the first sign of symptoms. These medicines act quickly to open the airways and make it easier to breathe. Make sure this medicine is available at all times. If prescribed, medicine may also be used 10 to 15 minutes before exercise. If you use your rescue medicine more than 3 times a week, you may need a controller medicine.

Controller Medicines - these should be taken every day to help prevent asthma symptoms and attacks. This medicine is very important because it helps treat constant swelling. If you are prescribed a controller medicine, you should be using it every day.

Ask your provider or pharmacist when to take all your medicine. Have your provider show you the proper way to use your asthma medicine. Also, talk with your provider about using a spacer with your medicine. Allergy medicine and shots may also help control your asthma.

If you have any side effects tell your provider. Most side effects from inhaled medications are mild. Tell your provider or pharmacist if you are drinking any teas, taking herbs, or using anything else for asthma control. These products may increase the side effects from your prescribed medication. Your provider can work out a plan with you so this does not happen.

What should a person with asthma do during an episode or attack?

- 1. Get away from the possible trigger.**
- 2. Take quick-relief or rescue medicine as prescribed by your provider.** (Follow your asthma action plan if you have one.)
- 3. Try to relax and breathe slowly.**
Breathe through your nose. Put your lips as if you were going to whistle. Blow out slowly. Take twice as long to breathe out as you did to breathe in. Relax. Keep doing this until it becomes easier to breathe.
- 4. If symptoms do not get better, call your provider.** If the episode or attack is severe and your life is in danger, go to the emergency room or call 911 right away.

What else can help?

Learn as much about asthma as you can. Read or go to an asthma education program. The American Lung Association and your provider are good resources for you to get help in managing asthma. A written asthma action plan will help let everyone know what actions should be taken when symptoms occur. This plan should be shared with family members and caretakers such as babysitters and teachers.

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Learn how to control your asthma

It is important to work with your provider to create an Asthma Action Plan. This is a written plan made by you and your provider. This plan helps you manage your asthma. Learn what can trigger an asthma episode or attack. Your provider can help you be aware of your triggers. Ask your provider about other triggers such as exercise, colds and flu and temperature changes. **Here are some common asthma triggers and ways to prevent an asthma episode or attack:**

Triggers	Actions	
<p>Dust and Dust Mites</p> <p>Dust mites are tiny bugs you cannot see that live in cloth or carpet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover pillows and mattress in special dust-proof covers. • Wash bedsheets and blankets in hot water once a week. • Remove objects that collect dust like stuffed toys, or wash them in hot water once a week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you have carpet, keep it clean at all times. The carpet should be vacuumed when the person who has asthma is not in the house. • Dust with a damp cloth and vacuum weekly. This should be done when the person who has asthma is not in the house. Use a HEPA bag with your vacuum. • If possible, remove carpet and use <u>area rugs</u>
Cockroaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep food and garbage in closed containers, never out in the open. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you live in an area where cockroaches are a problem, have your home exterminated.
Pets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, do not have pets in your home. • Do not have pets where you sleep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep pets away from carpets and upholstered furniture.
Tobacco Smoke and Other Fumes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not smoke. • Do not allow smoking in your home. • Do not use a wood burning stove or fireplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not use strong smelling cleaners. • Keep away from other strong smells such as perfumes, hair sprays, and paints.
Mold and Pollen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep bathrooms, kitchen, and basement dry and clean. • Clean and service heating, ventilation and air conditioning during allergy season. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your windows closed and use air conditioning during allergy season. • Stay indoors and keep the windows closed when pollen counts are high. • Use a dehumidifier.
Exercise, Sports or Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your provider about taking medicine before playing, exercise or sports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm up for at least 5-10 minutes before exercise or play.
Infection and other triggers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get a flu shot each fall season. • Wash hands frequently and avoid rubbing your eyes and face. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay away from sick people if possible.