

Managing Your Asthma



The sooner you know you have asthma, the sooner you can take steps to control it and live a healthy life. Your asthma is not controlled if:

- You have asthma symptoms two times a week or more.

or

- You wake up at night with asthma symptoms two times a month or more.

Work with your doctor to make an asthma action plan. Your plan is based on your age, symptoms and triggers, and will list your asthma medicines, how to stop flare-ups and what to do in an emergency.

Asthma action plan

An action plan, made by you **and** your doctor, will tell you how and when you should take your medicine. Writing down your symptoms, when they happen and what triggers your asthma can help to make the best action plan for you. Your action plan may also tell you to use a peak flow meter. A peak flow meter will help you know when to use your rescue inhaler and when to call the doctor.

An action plan has three zones, like a traffic light:

- Green zone is all clear; you do not have any symptoms and can do your daily routine. Take all routine medications as prescribed.
- Yellow zone means your asthma is starting to cause you symptoms. You need to use your rescue medicine as well as your daily medications as your doctor has told you.

You should stay away from triggers as much as you can and call your doctor if you aren't getting better.

- Red zone is your danger zone, you need to take your rescue medicine and call your doctor right away. If you are unable to contact your doctor, you may need to go to the hospital.

Medicines

There are two kinds of asthma medicines, preventive and rescue. Preventive medicine needs to be taken every day. It can help bring down the swelling in the airway and relax the muscle on the outside of the airway. This will help to prevent asthma symptoms from occurring and can prevent long-term lung damage.

Preventive medicines for asthma include:

- Inhaled corticosteroids stop swelling on the inside of the airway. They are taken everyday, no matter how you feel.
- Inhaled bronchodilators relax the muscle around the outside of the airway. Using this helps if you have asthma when you exercise or if you have asthma symptoms while on a corticosteroid alone. These come in two kinds; preventive (taken every day with a corticosteroid, rescue (taken only when symptoms occur). Everyone who has asthma should have a rescue inhaler with them at all times.
- Leukotriene modifiers can stop symptoms for up to 24 hours. These can help prevent both asthma and allergy symptoms.



Asthma action plans are good for understanding what your doctor wants you to do when your asthma gets worse. Ask your doctor how you can get an asthma action plan.

There are many ways to control asthma, talk with your doctor to find what works best for you. Be sure to ask when you should experience less symptoms and what side effects you should report to your doctor.

There are many ways to control asthma, talk with your doctor to find what works best for you. Be sure to ask when you should experience less symptoms and what side effects you should report to your doctor.

Rescue medicines are used for fast symptom relief when you are having an asthma attack. If you need to use your short-term medicine two times a week or more to reduce symptoms, talk with your doctor because to better control your asthma.

Short-term medicines include:

- Inhalers that can be carried around with you.
- Nebulizers that are used when asthma is more severe.

Ask your doctor if these medications are right for you.

Asthma triggers

Asthma triggers are anything that makes your asthma worse. You can help control your asthma by staying away from these possible triggers:

- **Irritants** – smoke, smog, aerosol sprays, strong smells or cleaning products.
- **Allergens** – dust mites, animal dander, mold, pollen, food allergies or cockroaches. If your asthma gets worse because of allergies, talk with your doctor about an allergy test, daily medicine about an allergist, daily medicines including nasal spray, and allergy shots.

- **Other triggers** – cold or hot air, weather changes, illnesses (like colds, flu or reflux disease), food additives like sulfites, aspirin or other medicines, strong feelings or laughter.

Exercise is important to a healthy lifestyle, but it can be a trigger for asthma. If asthma flare-ups are keeping you from being active, talk with your doctor to develop a plan to keep exercise an integral part of your life.

Emergency care

Many people control their asthma symptoms by following their action plan and going to the doctor regularly. There are times when you may need to go to the doctor right away.

Call your doctor if:

- Your medicines don't help stop an asthma attack.
- You have been in your yellow zone for more than a day.

Call 911 for emergency care if:

- You can't walk or talk because you're out of breath.
- You have blue lips or fingernails.



Ask your doctor if a spacer is right for you. These can be used with an inhaler for good medicine delivery to your lungs.

*Sources: Mayo Clinic, National Institutes of Health, Health Net Asthma Tips card and Asthma Action Plan and Diary
NHLBI, NIH*