

How to Manage Asthma



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With asthma, airways in the lungs are inflamed. During a flare-up or episode, your airways get more swollen and the muscles tighten. Wheezing, cough, chest tightness and shortness of breath are symptoms that can follow.

Know your triggers

An asthma trigger is something that makes your asthma symptoms worse.

This sudden worsening of symptoms is called an asthma attack, episode or flare-up. Knowing your triggers is a key step in managing asthma. Here are some common asthma triggers:

- **Health conditions** such as a cold, flu, sinus infection or acid reflux
- **Food allergies** or medicines such as aspirin, fever reducers or anti-inflammatories
- **Smoke** from cigarettes, fireplaces or burning leaves
- **Pollen** from weeds, grass, flowers and trees
- **Cold weather** and extreme temperature changes, high humidity, and air pollution or smog
- **Pests** such as dust mites, cockroaches or rodents
- **Dander and saliva** from pets with fur or feathers
- **Mold** from leaks, dampness or plant soil
- **Intense exercise**, such as climbing stairs, swimming or other sports
- **Strong emotions** and stress, such as feelings of anxiety, anger or fear
- **Strong odors** from cleaning or personal care products

Asthma triggers are different for everyone.

Work with your doctor to find out what makes your asthma worse, and find ways to avoid your personal triggers.

Understand and track your peak flow

Peak flow is a measure of how open your airways are.

A peak flow meter measures your ability to push air out of your lungs. You can use this device to find out:

- **How severe your asthma is** at any point in time
- **Your progress** and response to treatment
- **Whether your asthma is getting worse**, even before you feel symptoms

Your doctor can also use your peak flow readings to adjust your medicine, if needed.

What is your personal best?

Your personal best is the highest peak flow number you can get over two to three weeks, and taken when your asthma is under good control. Measure your asthma control by comparing your daily peak flow readings with your personal best reading. Once you know what your personal best peak flow rate is, it will be easier for you to notice when there are changes in your asthma symptoms.



Treat asthma

Medicine does not cure asthma, but it does help improve your symptoms.

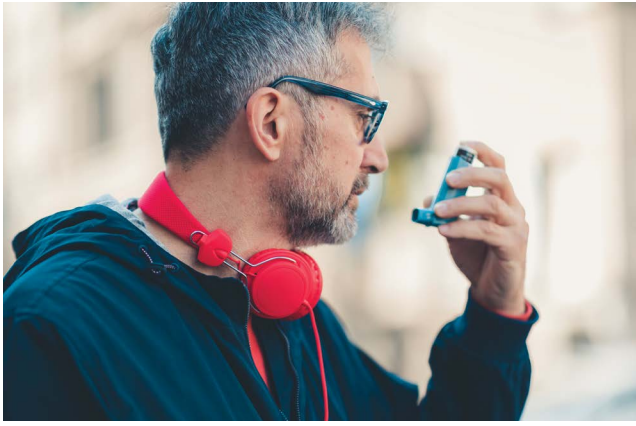
There are two common types of medicine for asthma:

Short-acting or “rescue” medicine relaxes the airway muscles. It provides quick relief for asthma symptoms. Take it when asthma symptoms start. Your doctor may also tell you to take it before exercise to help prevent asthma symptoms. Remember, rescue medicine doesn’t reduce inflammation. If you use it more than two days a week, your doctor may want to adjust your treatment and add a controller medicine.

Long-acting or “controller” medicine reduces airway swelling and mucus production. This type of medicine can help prevent an asthma attack. Most of these medicines have a corticosteroid, which reduces inflammation. Use this medicine every day, as your doctor tells you, even when you feel good. Additional use of this medication beyond its controller function should only occur if advised by your doctor.

If you are prescribed an inhaled corticosteroid “controller” medicine, make sure to rinse your mouth with water after each use. This can help prevent thrush, which is a mouth infection caused by yeast.

Your doctor may prescribe other treatments for asthma. Take medicine exactly as your doctor tells you. This means taking the right medicine at the right time in the right way. By doing so, you can have fewer symptoms, breathe better and do more of the things you like.



Using your inhaler the right way

Using your inhaler correctly will help your medicines work better.

Your doctor and/or pharmacist may have reviewed basic techniques with you. If you are still unsure of how to correctly use your inhaler, do not hesitate to reach out to your local pharmacist. Here are some tips to remember while using your inhaler:

- **Some inhalers may need priming before using.** Priming means to prepare your inhaler with test sprays before you take your dose. You will usually need to prime a new inhaler or an inhaler that has not been used for a long time. It is important to note that other inhalers do not need priming at all before using. Please check the directions for your specific inhaler.
- **Before you use your inhaler,** take a breath in and breathe all the way out gently. Every inhaler has a different breathing technique. Make sure to check the directions for your specific inhaler.

- **If it has been a while since you used your inhaler,** make sure to check the expiration date.
- **If you are experiencing difficulty using a metered-dose type of inhaler,** talk with your doctor or pharmacist about getting a spacer. A spacer is a tube that connects to your inhaler mouthpiece. It helps the medicine reach your lungs better and reduces side effects.

Know your action plan

Work with your healthcare provider to create a written Asthma Action Plan.

An Asthma Action Plan will tell you what you can do to keep your asthma from getting worse. It will also give you instructions on when you should call your healthcare provider or call 911 and go to the hospital.

Your plan should include:

- Triggers that make your asthma worse
- What medicines you take to treat asthma
- The symptoms or peak flow readings that mean your asthma is getting worse
- What medicines to take depending on your asthma symptoms or peak flow readings. Asthma Action Plan instructions are usually divided into what to do when you are in your **green zone** (no symptoms and feeling good), **yellow zone** (having some asthma symptoms), and **red zone** (severe asthma symptoms/ medical emergency)
- When to call 911 and seek urgent medical care based on your symptoms or peak flow readings
- Phone numbers for your emergency contacts, healthcare provider, and hospital



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