



Asthma

Guide to Good Health

Healthy Living Guide

- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS)
- ▶ Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)
- ▶ Coronary Artery Disease (CAD)
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Hyperlipidemia
- ▶ Hypertension
- ▶ Osteoarthritis (OA)
- ▶ Osteoporosis
- ▶ Type 2 Diabetes
- ▶ Back Pain
- ▶ Chronic Pain
- ▶ Healthy Eating
- ▶ Healthy Pregnancy
- ▶ Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)
- ▶ Sleep
- ▶ Smoking Cessation
- ▶ Stress Management
- ▶ Weight Management
- ▶ Bariatric Surgery

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a long-term respiratory condition, in which the airways may unexpectedly and suddenly narrow, often in response to an allergen, cold air, exercise, or emotional stress. Asthma causes inflammation of the bronchial tubes in your lungs. Inflammation causes the smooth muscles of the bronchial tubes to tighten and mucus to form, which physically blocks oxygen from getting into your lungs.

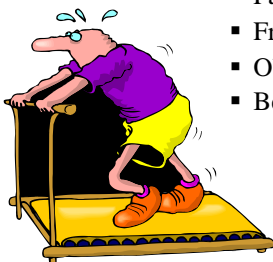
Overview & Facts

- Asthma affects people of all ages, but it most often starts in childhood.
- In the United States, more than 22 million people are known to have asthma. Nearly 6 million of these people are children.
- Asthma is a chronic disease that can start at any age.
- Sometimes children “outgrow” their asthma, but most people have asthma for the rest of their lives.
- Someone with asthma may go long periods without any asthma flares.

Causes

The exact cause of asthma is not known although it probably is a combination of genetics and environmental factors.

The inflammation is usually caused by allergies, but breathing cold air, exercising, breathing in smoke from cigarettes or fires, respiratory infections, some medicines, stress, and gastroesophageal reflux can also trigger asthma flare or attack in some people.



Signs & Symptoms

- ✓ Having difficulty taking a deep breath
- ✓ Feeling tightness in your chest
- ✓ Wheezing that you can hear when you breathe in
- ✓ Feeling hot and/or irritable
- ✓ Frequent dry cough especially at night
- ✓ Feeling breathless



Risk Factors

- Having allergies
- Exposure to second hand smoke and other pollutants
- Family history of asthma
- Frequent respiratory infections
- Obesity
- Being underweight as a newborn



Questions to Ask Your Provider

1. Do I have asthma?
2. What kind of tests will I need?
3. What medications will I take? When and how do I take them? How do I use an inhaler?
4. What type of activity can I do?
5. Do my feelings cause asthma?
6. What are my asthma triggers and how can I avoid them?
7. Can I live a normal life?
8. How severe is my asthma?
9. What do I do if I have an asthma attack/flare?
10. When should I call you vs. going to the ER?
11. When should I go to the ER?
12. What are my treatment goals?

Diagnostic Workup

Your doctor will look at your risk factors and signs and symptoms to determine if you might have asthma. The doctor will listen to your lungs and have you do some tests. These tests could include:

- Spirometry: In this test you take a deep breath and blow it out as fast and as completely as you are able into mouthpiece of a machine measuring the amount and speed of your breath.
- Methacholine challenge test: Methacholine is a known asthma trigger for everyone with asthma. The doctor has you breathe it in and then checks you for signs and symptoms of asthma.



Treatment and Care

1. Medical

Care also involves learning to use a peak flow meter. Peak flow meters measure how much oxygen is in your lungs. Each person with asthma must take several readings to determine their best range. When the peak flow meter measures below this range, the person with asthma knows it is time to use their asthma action plan.



Your doctor will help you write an asthma action plan once your triggers are identified and your medications are selected.

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An asthma action plan should include:

- Tracking your symptoms
- Checking your lung function
- Identifying personal signs and symptoms of asthma flare for individual
- Using medications appropriately and in correct sequence
- Nearest ER if action plan fails
- Example of an asthma action plan:
 - ✓ Doctor's Name
 - ✓ Address
 - ✓ Telephone Number
 - ✓ Emergency Contact Name
 - ✓ Hospital/Emergency Department Number
 - ✓ My Medications
- Quick-Relief Medications

It is important to find a doctor or allergist to manage your care. Types of doctors treating asthma are:

- General Practitioner
- Family Medicine Doctor
- Internist
- Pulmonologist
- Allergist



2. Pharmacological

Treatment and care includes using medications such as pills, inhalers, and possibly nebulizer treatments.

The types of medications used to treat asthma are:

- Steroids (oral, nasal, and inhaled)
- Medications that stop the inflammation (oral and inhaled)
- Fast acting medications to open the bronchial tubes (oral and inhaled) during a flare
- Antihistamines and/or antibiotics to prevent asthma flares



3. Emotional/Psychological

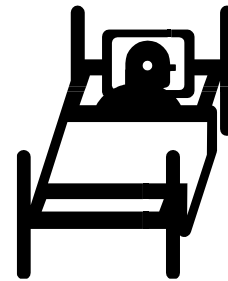
Asthma flares can cause anxiety and even feelings of panic. Having a written asthma action plan helps you feel in control. A written plan can be placed in your wallet. Following a written plan when flares develop reduces the anxiety of remembering what to do and helps you feel in control.

Stress & Asthma

Stress can trigger asthma. Becoming anxious or stressed during an asthma flare can add to your asthma symptoms especially shortness of breath. You cannot avoid stress; it is part of your daily life. However, developing effective ways to manage stress and learning to relax can help you prevent shortness of breath and avoid panic.

Here are ways to manage stress:

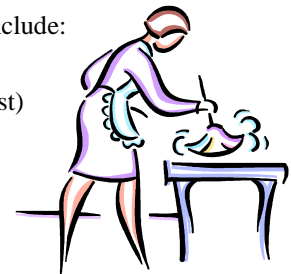
1. Learn to change the thoughts that are producing stress
2. Reduce what is causing you stress. If you cannot resolve the stress alone, get professional help.
3. Try to avoid situations that trigger stress for you (e.g., by practicing effective time management skills, setting priorities, pacing self, and taking time out for you).
4. Practice relaxation exercises
5. Exercise
6. Develop a healthy sleep routine.
7. Limiting sugar, caffeine, and alcohol can promote health and reduce stress.



4. Physical

Care involves identifying personal asthma triggers for the person with asthma. These may include:

- Infection
- Allergens (animal dander or dried saliva of animals)
- Cold air
- Dust mites
- Certain medicines
- Sulfites in foods and beverages
- Exercise
- Irritants (smoke, perfumes, dust)
 - ✓ Cockroaches
 - ✓ Indoor mold
 - ✓ Pollen and outdoor mold
 - ✓ Vacuum cleaning



Avoiding triggers and using prescribed medications consistently and correctly will help prevent asthma flares and allow the person with asthma to go about their daily life.

5. Nutrition

Avoiding food allergens is important to prevent flares. A balanced diet will help maintain good health.



As with any chronic illness, following a well

Healthy Lifestyle Management

Asthma is a chronic disease that can be managed in a way to allow a typical life with few restrictions.

- Use your Asthma Action Plan
- Get vaccinated against flu and pneumonia
- Do not smoke
- Stay away from smoke and air pollutants
- Avoid triggers



Resources

- ❖ National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health
- ❖ Healthy Eating Guide to Good Health
- ❖ Sleep Guide to Good Health
- ❖ Stress Management Guide to Good Health