

Breathe Easy

Tips for controlling your Asthma



Have you or a family member
been told you have asthma?

Are you or a family member
coughing or wheezing?

Do you or a family member
have tightness in your chest?

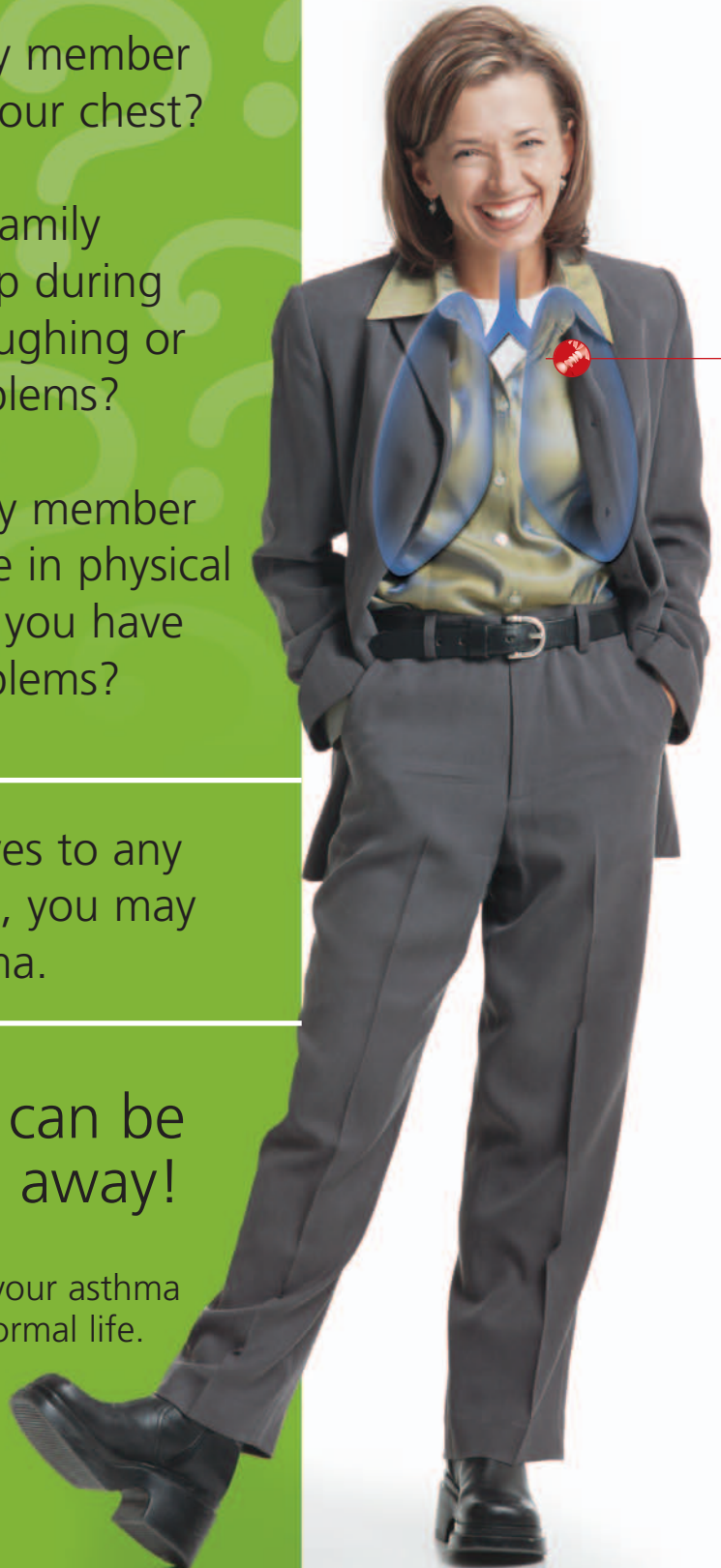
Do you or a family
member wake up during
the night with coughing or
breathing problems?

Are you or a family member
unable to participate in physical
activities because you have
breathing problems?

If you answered yes to any
of these questions, you may
have asthma.

**Better health can be
only a breath away!**

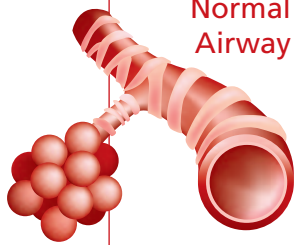
Learn how to control your asthma
so you can lead a normal life.



What is Asthma?

Asthma is a condition that affects 17.6 million Americans.¹ Asthma causes your airways to tighten, swell, and become clogged with mucus. Even when you feel well, the swelling and mucus are there, and you can have an asthma attack. That's when you begin coughing, wheezing, and feeling short of breath. By learning about your asthma, you will know what to do to keep from getting worse. And you will know how to prevent asthma attacks in the future. This will help put you in control instead of the asthma controlling you!

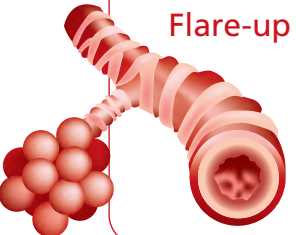
Normal Airway



When you have Asthma

When you have asthma, triggers can inflame the sensitive airways in your lungs. This inflammation makes the airways "twitchy" (even more sensitive to triggers). Your airways can then become so narrow that air has trouble getting in and out of your lungs. This is what causes the symptoms of an asthma flare-up.

Flare-up



Goals for managing your asthma

- ▶ Sleep all night without any asthma symptoms
- ▶ Participate in activities such as walking, exercising, or sports without asthma symptoms
- ▶ Have a medication plan that tells you how to increase your asthma medications when symptoms begin
- ▶ Partner with your physician to manage your asthma
- ▶ Prevent attacks that may cause you to go to the emergency room or hospital

Medication Management

Most asthmatics take medications daily to control their condition. The goal is to maintain control of asthma with little or no side effects. The two types of asthma medications used are:

- ▶ Long-term control medications
- ▶ Quick-relief medications

Long-term control medications are taken every day to prevent asthma attacks or symptoms. Even if you feel well, you should still take the medications. These medications help to prevent the swelling and tightening of your airway. However, if you are having an asthma attack, these will not help immediately.

Quick-relief medications work fast when you are having asthma symptoms and will open your airways, so you can breathe easier.

Your doctor will include the name of your long-term medications and quick-relief medications when you and your doctor develop your Asthma Self-Management Plan (ASMA).



Peak Flow Meter

A peak flow meter is a tool to help measure your asthma symptoms. The peak flow meter measures how well you are able to push the air out of your lungs. A peak flow meter has a scale that measures your lung volume. Keep a record of these readings so your doctor can help you to manage your asthma medications better.

A peak flow meter is very easy to use. Even small children can learn to use a peak flow meter. There are many types of peak flow meters. Ask your doctor to write a prescription for a peak flow meter and take it to a participating pharmacy.



It is important for you and your doctor to know your peak flow number when you are not having symptoms. Check peak flow readings everyday. Adjust your medications by using the ASMA plan your doctor has developed with you.



ASTHMA TRIGGERS

DUST SMOKE ANIMALS
ODORS POLLEN WEATHER
EMOTIONS FOOD MEDICINES
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Asthma triggers are things at your home, work or school that may cause you or your child to have asthma symptoms or attacks. The triggers can be different for each person.

DUST Use allergy-proof covers on pillows, box springs, and mattresses. Wash sheets weekly in hot water. Do not have dust collectors, rugs, heavy drapes, carpeting or stuffed animals in the bedroom. Dust frequently.

SMOKE Do not allow smoking in your home or use wood-burning stoves or fireplaces.

MOLD Keep the bathroom clean and dry. Be careful with houseplants, as the soil can have mold in it. Keep inhalers, spacers, and nebulizers clean.

ODORS Try to stay away from sprays, perfumes, air fresheners, cleaning supplies or anything with a strong odor.

POLLEN Limit your outdoor activity when the pollen count is high. Do not open the windows. Use the air conditioner. Keep the filter clean on the air conditioner.

WEATHER Going from warm indoor air to cold outdoor air may cause an asthma attack. Cover your mouth and nose before going outside in the cold.

EMOTIONS Getting upset, and sometimes even laughing, can cause asthma symptoms. Breathing slowly and deeply can help control these symptoms.

FOOD AND MEDICINES

Chemicals that are added to foods to help preserve them may cause asthma attacks. You may find certain foods and medications, especially those with aspirin in them, trigger asthma symptoms, too. Talk with your doctor before taking any medicines you can buy over the counter.

ANIMALS Keep pets out of the house if possible, and out of the bedroom at all times.

Asthma Self-Management Action Plan

Asthmatics should have a written medication plan called an Asthma Self-Management Plan (ASMA). This plan should be discussed with your doctor. The ASMA has three zones: green, yellow, and red.

- ▶ The green zone lists all the asthma medications you take every day.
- ▶ The yellow zone means you are starting to have warning signs, such as shortness of breath or coughing. Your doctor will write down in the medication plan which medications need to be increased to prevent an asthma attack.
- ▶ If you do not treat your symptoms, you could go into the red zone, which is dangerous.

Using the ASMA plan will help you know what to do when asthma symptoms start. Review this plan with your doctor at least every three to six months.

Who should have a copy of your Self-Management Action Plan?

- ▶ School nurse or teachers (especially the physical education teacher or coach)
- ▶ Day-care providers or babysitters
- ▶ Doctor
- ▶ Asthmatic and parents



GREEN ZONE **Doing well. Take these long-term-control medicines each day.**

No cough, wheeze, chest tightness, shortness of breath during the day or night. Can do usual activities.

-AND- Peak flow is more than _____.

Medicine	How much to take	When to take
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

YELLOW ZONE **Asthma is getting worse.**

Cough, wheeze, chest tightness, or shortness of breath, or waking at night due to asthma, or can do some, but not all, usual activities -OR- Peak flow _____ to _____ (50% to 80% of best peak flow)

1ST Add quick-relief medicine, continue taking Green Zone medicine.

Take _____ short-acting B2 – agonist 2 puffs or 4 puffs every 20 minutes, up to one hour nebulizer once

2ND If your symptoms and peak flow return to Green Zone after one hour of treatment:

- ▶ Take the quick relief medicine every 4 hours for 1 to 2 days.
- ▶ Double the dose of your inhaled steroid for _____ (7 to 10 days).

-OR-

If your symptoms and peak flow DO NOT return to GREEN ZONE after one hour of either of the above treatments:

- ▶ Take _____ short-acting B2 – agonist 2 or 4 puffs or nebulizer
- ▶ Add _____ oral steroid _____ mg per day for _____ (3 to 10 days)
- ▶ Call the doctor before within _____ hours after taking the oral steroid

RED ZONE: **Medical alert!**

Very short of breath, or quick-relief medicines have not helped, or cannot do usual activities, or symptoms are same or worse after 24 hours in Yellow Zone -OR- Peak flow: less than _____ (50% of best peak flow)

Take this medicine!

- ▶ _____ short-acting B2 – agonist 4 puffs 6 puffs nebulizer
- ▶ _____ oral steroid _____ mg per day

Then call your doctor NOW! Go to the hospital or call for an ambulance if you are still in the red zone after 15 minutes AND you have not reached your doctor.

DANGER SIGNS: **Trouble walking and talking due to shortness of breath. Lips or fingernails are blue**

- ▶ Take 4 puffs 6 puffs of your quick-relief medicine then go to the hospital or call for an ambulance, NOW!

Working with your doctor to better manage your asthma

Have you ever left your doctor's office feeling like you didn't get all of your questions answered, or even asked? For many people, a visit to the doctor can be stressful and even frightening. So it's not surprising that they leave the doctor's office with many of their questions still unanswered.

Making the most of your doctor's visit

Being able to talk with your doctor is a big step in managing your asthma. Good communication allows you to take charge of your health and work with your doctor to develop the best asthma treatment plan for you. It is your right to know about your health and understand your asthma. Therefore, you should take responsibility for making sure you and your doctor work together as a team by:

- ▶ Giving clear information to your doctor about warning signs and symptoms,
- ▶ Listening closely and carefully to the instructions your doctor gives you, and
- ▶ Asking questions if there is something you don't understand.

Preparing for your next visit

Because the visit with your doctor is the best time to learn about your asthma, you want to make sure you are prepared. By planning ahead and being prepared, you are less likely to forget your important questions.

As you prepare for your next office visit, here are a few points to help you and your doctor develop the best treatment plan for you. Talk to your doctor about:

- ▶ What type of symptoms you have and how long they have lasted
- ▶ What causes your asthma symptoms
- ▶ What types of medications you take
- ▶ Whether you are able to exercise
- ▶ Whether you sleep through the night
- ▶ Your peak flow readings (if you are currently using a peak flow meter)
- ▶ How your daily life is affected by your asthma

At the end of your appointment, make sure you have a good understanding of your treatment plan. If you still have questions, ask your doctor or his/her staff to explain what you don't understand. At each follow-up visit, update your doctor on the points above. Keeping your doctor informed about changes in your health is part of being a team.

Being assertive

Because the relationship with your doctor is so important, an assertive approach is best when talking to him or her. Being assertive means being positive and polite while insisting on your right to understand your asthma and the treatment your doctor has planned for you. Here are some ideas to help you to be assertive when talking to your doctor:

- ▶ Be positive. While you may be upset about your asthma, being positive will help both you and your doctor keep an open mind and improve communication.
- ▶ Identify your concerns. Is there something you are worried about or don't understand? Discuss it with your doctor.
- ▶ Bring a list of questions with you. Sometimes it is difficult to remember what you want to talk to your doctor about. Between appointments, write down your questions and concerns and bring them with you to your next visit.
- ▶ Be specific. Vague or unclear information makes it more difficult for your doctor to develop a treatment plan for you. Give your doctor detailed information about your asthma symptoms.
- ▶ Take notes. Writing down what you and your doctor talked about makes it easier to remember important information about your asthma or your treatment plan.
- ▶ Be honest about your feelings. If your doctor recommends something you don't agree with or you have no intention of doing, tell him or her. Only by working together will you develop and agree on the best asthma treatment plan for you.
- ▶ Remember that your doctor is human. No one has all the right answers, but each member of your health care team can contribute to your overall treatment plan.

Tips for talking with doctors

It is important to talk with your doctor in a way that asserts your rights and helps to build a good relationship. A good relationship and open communication benefits you by helping your doctor to manage your asthma more effectively.

Here are some tips for talking with doctors:

- ▶ Get to the point. Taking a list of questions with you will help.
- ▶ Ask the doctor to please tell you exactly what to do.
- ▶ If you are confused, ask the doctor to repeat the information or say it another way.
- ▶ Ask the doctor to write down instructions or write them down yourself.
- ▶ Tell the doctor when you don't understand a medical term, word, or phrase.
- ▶ Use "I" when saying how someone makes you feel, what you want, or what is on your mind. Don't accuse others with "You said..." or "You think..."
- ▶ For example, say: "But I understood you to say that I should do this and that..." instead of: "But you said I should do this and that..."
- ▶ Say: "I feel belittled – or it makes me feel like I am stupid – when we talk this way..." instead of: "You said that in a condescending way" or "You don't have to put me down!"

Working with your doctor

You and your doctor are a team, working together to better manage your asthma. It will be easier to do this if you keep in mind the following points when you talk with him or her.

- ▶ Stay calm even when you feel yourself getting frustrated.
- ▶ Don't agree to do something that you have no intention of doing. Ask if another option is available. Unless your doctor is told that a treatment plan is hard for you, he or she will not know to make changes.

Your health is your responsibility

Taking an active role in your health care means understanding and agreeing to the instructions your doctor or his/her staff gives you about your asthma treatment. Make sure you know exactly what you should do, how to do it, and for how long. In addition, know when to see your doctor for routine visits, as well as for urgent ones. If your asthma symptoms are getting worse or you are using more medication than usual, don't wait for your next routine visit. Call your doctor as soon as possible.

Understand your treatment plan

In order to get the most benefit from a treatment plan, you need to understand it. You need to know when and how to take your medications to help you manage your asthma more effectively. You should know what triggers your asthma and how to avoid those triggers when possible. Finally, you need to work with your doctor to develop an emergency plan and know when and how to use it. If you are not able to follow your asthma treatment plan, tell your doctor. There may be another option that works for you.

Knowing when to see your doctor

You and your doctor should develop a regular schedule for office visits, one that fits your specific treatment plan. These visits will help both of you to monitor your asthma and make changes in your plan as needed.

Unfortunately, there will be times when seeing your doctor is urgent. Ask your doctor for guidelines on when it is important to call. In addition to the guidelines listed below, he or she may have other times when they want you to call. You should follow your doctor's advice and see him or her as soon as possible if:

- ▶ Your asthma symptoms are occurring more often or seem worse than normal.
- ▶ You are taking your medicine more often to control your symptoms.
- ▶ A medicine does not seem to be helping or is making you feel worse.
- ▶ Your living arrangements change. In addition, seek help immediately if any of the following symptoms appear:
 - ▶ Your asthma gets worse even after taking your medicine and following your action plan.
 - ▶ Your peak flow reading falls into the red zone shown on the meter.
 - ▶ Your lips or fingernails turn blue.
 - ▶ Your breathing is rapid, and all your attention is focused on breathing.

Remember

If you are in doubt, contact your doctor. Your health is nothing to play around with.

Congratulations

You have taken the first steps toward controlling your asthma. Being responsible for your health and working with your doctor to manage your asthma puts you in control.

Source: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, GlaxoSmithKline

