

Living Well with Asthma



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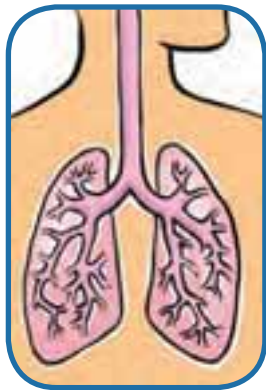
Living with Asthma

If you have asthma, there's good news. Today, people with asthma are living healthier and feeling better. With self-care, you have the power to manage asthma and feel your best.

Why Is Managing Asthma Important?

Asthma is a disease that narrows the airways.

It can be worsened by everyday things such as dust or smoke (triggers). An asthma flare-up causes coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. If asthma isn't managed well, your lungs can be permanently damaged.



The Goals of Self-Care

Self-care combined with your healthcare provider's treatment program is the best way to protect your health. Self-care means:

- Managing your condition and improving your health to feel your best.
- Responding to symptoms and knowing when to get help.
- Avoiding known triggers and following your healthcare provider's advice.

Monitoring Peak Flow

Do you know how open your airways are right now? You can use a peak flow meter to find out. Peak flow monitoring can warn you of flare-ups, even before you have symptoms.

How to Use a Peak Flow Meter

- Move the marker to 0, or to the lowest number.
- Stand or sit up straight. Be in the same position each time you test.
- Take a deep breath, as deep as you can.
- Put the mouthpiece between your upper and lower teeth. Close your lips tightly around it.
- Blow once, as hard and as fast as you can.
- Take the meter out of your mouth. Write down the number where the marker has moved. Then put the marker back to 0, or the lowest number.
- Repeat as directed. Ask your healthcare provider how often to check peak flow and how to get your personal best number.



Using the Asthma Zones

The Asthma Zones can help you track and respond to asthma symptoms.

Green Zone: Keep Taking Daily Medications

- No wheezing.
- Asthma doesn't interrupt your sleep or cause you to miss work or school.
- Quick-relief medication is rarely needed.
- Peak flow is 80% to 100% of personal best.



Yellow Zone: Take More Medication as Directed

- Some coughing, wheezing, or chest tightness.
- Breathing (while at rest) is a little faster than normal.
- Peak flow is 50% to 80% of personal best.



Red Zone: Take Action, Get Help

- Constant coughing, wheezing, or difficulty breathing.
- Waking from sleep more often because of asthma symptoms.
- Peak flow is less than 50% of personal best.
- Take medication as directed and call your healthcare provider.
- **Call 911** (emergency) if you're struggling to breathe, can't walk or talk, or your lips or fingernails are turning blue.



Taking Medication

Medication is an important tool for managing asthma. If your healthcare provider prescribes medications, be sure to know how and when to use them.

Quick-Relief Medications

- Are inhaled when needed.
- Open the airways right after you take them.
- Can stop flare-ups once they've started.
- Can be used to prevent flare-ups triggered by exercise.



Long-Term Medications

- Are inhaled or swallowed on schedule, usually every day.
- Help keep asthma under control and reduce chances of a flare-up.
- Will not stop a flare-up once it has begun.



Your Treatment Plan May Need Adjusting If...

- You use a quick-relief inhaler more than 2 times a week (not including exercise).
- You wake up with asthma symptoms more than 2 times a month.
- You refill your quick-relief inhaler more than 2 times a year.

Using an Inhaler

An inhaler gives a measured amount of medication. Use your inhaler as instructed by your healthcare provider.

Getting Ready

- Remove the cap from the inhaler and shake well.
- Attach the inhaler to a spacer if you have one. Breathe out.



Breathing In

With a Spacer

- Place the spacer between your teeth. Close your lips around it.
- Breathe in through your mouth as you press on the inhaler.



Without a Spacer

- Place the inhaler between your teeth. Close your lips around it.
- Breathe in through your mouth as you press on the inhaler.



Breathing Out

- Hold your breath.
- Count to 10. Then slowly breathe out.



Avoiding Outdoor Triggers

Outdoor triggers tend to be seasonal. This means during certain parts of the year you may need to stay inside more often to reduce symptoms. Common outdoor triggers are discussed here.

Weather

- Dress for the weather. If cold air triggers your asthma, try wearing a scarf over your nose and mouth.
- Limit outdoor activity on windy days, especially if the weather is very hot or very cold.
- Make the most of good weather. Head outside and have fun.



Smog and Pollen

- Keep an eye on local air quality reports, especially in the summer. You can find reports in the newspaper, on the radio, or online.
- On days with poor air quality or high pollen counts, stay indoors as much as you can.
- On days with good air quality, head outside and exercise.
- Use air conditioning instead of opening the windows in your home or car.



Reducing Indoor Triggers

Indoor triggers cause a lot of problems for people with asthma. But there are steps you can take to limit your exposure. The most common indoor triggers are discussed here.

Dust Mites

- Wash bedding in hot water each week.
- Cover your mattress and pillows with dust-mite-proof cases.
- Use pull-down shades or vertical blinds instead of horizontal blinds.
- If you can, replace wall-to-wall carpets with linoleum, hardwood, or tile floors. Use washable throw rugs.



Animals

- If you want a pet, it's best to choose one that doesn't have fur or feathers.
- Keep pets with feathers or fur out of your home. If you can't do this, keep them out of the room you sleep in.
- Wash your hands after handling pets.
- If you're allergic to feathers, don't use down (feather) pillows, comforters, or jackets.



Mold

- Have someone else clean damp areas weekly. This includes shower stalls and sinks.
- While showering or bathing, run an exhaust fan or leave a window open in the bathroom.
- Don't use vaporizers, humidifiers, or evaporative (swamp) coolers. They increase the humidity that can cause mold to grow.



Insects and Pests

- Store food in tightly sealed containers.
- Keep your kitchen clean.
- Remove garbage from your home daily.
- Use a pest control service or home pest control to get rid of cockroaches. Avoid using chemical sprays.



Smoke

- If you smoke, talk to your healthcare provider about programs to help you quit.
- Avoid secondhand smoke. Don't let people smoke in your home or car.
- Sit in the nonsmoking section when eating out. Ask for nonsmoking hotel rooms and rental cars.
- Avoid fireplaces and wood stoves. If you can't, sit away from them. Make sure the smoke is directed outside.



Perfumes and Odors

- For household cleaning, mix water with white vinegar or baking soda. Use this instead of bleach or ammonia.
- Use scent-free detergents, shampoos, soaps, and other products whenever you can.
- Store clothes in boxes with lids instead of using mothballs or cedar chips.
- Use exhaust fans while cooking to reduce odors.



Staying Active

Asthma doesn't have to keep you from enjoying exercise. The key is knowing what you can do. Some activities may be outside your comfort range. But you can manage asthma and still stay fit.

Get Your Body Moving

- Choose aerobic exercises such as distance walking, biking, swimming, and dancing. These activities strengthen your heart and lungs.
- Make exercise part of your weekly routine. Sign up for yoga, spinning, or dance classes.
- Combine exercise with exploring. Hike in a state park. Walk through a museum or an aquarium.



Exercise Safely

- For some people, exercise is an asthma trigger. If this is true for you, talk to your healthcare provider. You may need to take medication before exercise.
- Slowly work up to 30 minutes of activity a day. Don't overdo it.
- Use medication as directed.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Warm up for at least 5 minutes before exercise.

Feeling Better

Dealing with asthma may seem overwhelming. And feeling stressed can make your symptoms even worse. But you're not alone. There are many resources to help you cope with asthma.

Reducing Stress

- Try to reduce the overall stress in your life. Feeling upset, excited, or stressed can trigger asthma symptoms.
- Check your health plan or local hospital for stress-reduction classes.
- Learn ways to relax. Try listening to music or gently stretching. Close your eyes and imagine a place that is calming.
- Take slow, deep breaths when you start to feel stressed.

Getting Support

- Ask your healthcare team or your local American Lung Association about asthma support groups.
- Talk to family, friends, and co-workers about asthma. Share this brochure with them.
- Have someone go with you to appointments with your healthcare provider.
- Be sure to ask for help when needed.



The information in this guide has been accumulated from current medical literature and is generally accepted by the medical community at this time. However, this information is not meant as a substitute for personal medical advice. If you have worrisome symptoms or conditions, contact a physician immediately.

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staywell