

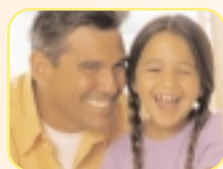
- **ASTHMA basics**

- **UNDERSTANDING peak flow**

- **taking ASTHMA MEDICINE**

- **STAYING AWAY FROM triggers**

- **exercising WITH ASTHMA**



ASTHMA BASICS

Air moves in and out of your lungs through your airways. Asthma is a lung disease that narrows your airways and makes breathing difficult. Although asthma can't be cured, it can be controlled and you can lead a normal life.

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Understanding triggers

Asthma makes your airways very sensitive and swollen. When your airways come into contact with "triggers," they narrow and it becomes hard to breathe. Your triggers may include:

- Tobacco smoke
- Dust mites
- Animal dander
- Cockroaches
- Molds
- Pollen
- Sprays, smoke and strong odors

Why the airways narrow

Triggers narrow the airways by causing:

- Increased swelling in the airways
- Extra mucus (a thick liquid) production
- The muscles around the airways tighten and squeeze the airways together

Asthma symptoms

Asthma symptoms come and go. They can be mild to severe. When symptoms are severe, it is called an asthma attack. Common symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Tightness in the chest

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

If you have asthma symptoms, visit your health care provider.

ASTHMA TREATMENT GOALS

Each person may have different asthma treatment goals. In general, you and your doctor will work as a team to:

- Identify triggers and find ways for you to avoid them
- Come up with a medication plan that has few side effects
- Prevent asthma symptoms and keep you active
- Keep you breathing as freely as possible



KEEPING ASTHMA UNDER CONTROL

When your asthma is under control, you can have a normal life. You can work and play and sleep peacefully through the night.

To control your asthma:

- Check your breathing as instructed by your doctor
- Take medicine as instructed by your doctor
- Stay away from things that trigger attacks
- Exercise regularly

What else you should do

- See your doctor regularly
- Learn as much as you can about asthma

SIGNS OF POOR ASTHMA CONTROL

Poor asthma control leads to asthma symptoms. If you have signs of poor control, call your doctor. Your asthma is not under control if:

- Your symptoms wake you up at night
- Your are using quick-relief medicine more often
- You need to visit the emergency room

UNDERSTANDING PEAK FLOW

Peak flow refers to how fast you can blow air out of your lungs. Your doctor may tell you to keep track of your peak flow at home. Your peak flow measurement tells you how well your asthma is in control.

THE PEAK FLOW METER

Peak flow is measured with a simple, inexpensive device called a peak flow meter. Your doctor will tell you how often to measure your peak flow.

Using a peak flow meter

1. Slide the marker down to zero.
2. Stand or sit up straight.
3. Take a deep breath to fill up your lungs.
4. Hold your breath and put the mouthpiece in your mouth, between your teeth. Close your lips around it. Don't put your tongue inside the hole.
5. Breathe into the mouthpiece as fast as you can.
6. Take the meter out of your mouth and check the marker.
7. Repeat the test two more times. Write down your scores. The highest number is your peak flow.

YOUR PERSONAL BEST

Your personal best is the highest peak flow number you can get during a time when your asthma is in good control. Your doctor will tell you exactly how to find your personal best.

THE PEAK FLOW ZONES

There are three peak flow zones: green, yellow and red. The zones are the same colors as a traffic light. What you need to do to get your asthma in control depends on which zone you are in.

WHICH ZONE ARE YOU IN?

For each zone, your doctor will give you a range of peak flow numbers. The ranges are based on your personal best.

Each time you check your peak flow, compare the number with the numbers given for your peak flow zones and see where you fall.

Green Zone: Asthma in good control

- Peak flow 80% to 100% of your personal best
- No coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or shortness of breath during the day or night
- Can do normal activities

Yellow Zone: Asthma is getting worse

- Peak flow 50% to 79% of your personal best
- Coughing, wheezing, tightness in chest, shortness of breath and waking at night due to asthma
- Asthma interferes with some activities

Red Zone: Medical alert

- Peak flow less than 50% of your personal best
- Very short of breath, quick-relief medicines do not help
- Can't do normal activities
- Yellow Zone symptoms still present after 24 hours

View [How to Use Your Peak Flow Meter](#) for additional information and [Asthma Action Plan](#) for identifying and tracking your asthma control.

Each person's triggers are different.



TYPES OF ASTHMA MEDICINE

Anti-inflammatories

- Reduce swelling in the airways
- Are generally used for long-term control of asthma symptoms

Bronchodilators

- Open up the airways by relaxing the muscles that surround them
- Are generally used for quick relief of asthma symptoms

USING A METERED DOSE INHALER

Many asthma medicines are breathed right into the lungs through an inhaler. A device called a spacer can be used to trap the medicine as it comes out of the inhaler. This makes the medicine easier to inhale. To use your inhaler correctly, follow these steps:*

1. Take off the cap and shake the inhaler.
2. Breathe out as much as you can.
3. Hold the inhaler or spacer in or near your mouth as instructed by your doctor.
4. Slowly begin to breathe in through your mouth. At the same time, push down on the top of the inhaler. Breathe in as deeply as you can.

*Different types of inhalers may have different instructions. Check with your health care provider.

TAKING MEDICATION & STAYING AWAY FROM TRIGGERS

5. Hold your breath and slowly count to 10.
6. If you need to take more than one puff of a short-acting bronchodilator, wait one minute between puffs. With other medicines, you don't need to wait.

STAYING AWAY FROM TRIGGERS

Triggers are things that make your asthma worse and lead to asthma attacks. Avoiding triggers or working to lessen their impact is an important part of asthma treatment. Each person's triggers are different. For help figuring out what triggers your asthma, see your doctor.

Tobacco smoke

If tobacco smoke triggers asthma symptoms:

- Don't smoke or allow anyone else to smoke in your home
- Sit in no-smoking sections in restaurants
- Ask for no-smoking hotel rooms and rental cars

Dust mites

Dust mites live in house dust. They are very tiny bugs you can't see. If dust mites make your asthma worse:

- Cover your mattress, box spring and pillows in airtight plastic or vinyl cases
- Use polyester, linen or cotton bedding. Wash it in hot water once a week

- Use roll-down shades or unlined washable curtains instead of blinds
- Replace rugs and carpets with hardwood, tile or linoleum, and wet mop at least twice a week
- If you must have rugs and carpets, follow the vacuum cleaning guidelines in the More Asthma Triggers section of this guide.
- Dust with a damp cloth often — keep things that collect dust in closed cabinets and drawers
- Use central or room air conditioning, setting it at "recycle" or "recirculate," and change filters often

Animal dander

Animal dander is dried saliva and dead skin flakes from animals with fur or feathers. If animal dander makes your asthma worse, but you don't want to give up your pet:

- Keep your pet out of the house or at least out of your bedroom
- Have a person without asthma brush the pet outdoors and give the pet a bath with mild shampoo or plain water once a week
- Wash your hands after touching your pet



Cockroaches

Cockroach droppings and body parts are major asthma triggers. To control cockroaches:

- Hire a professional exterminator — leave the house and put your pets outside while work is being done
- Wet mop or vacuum cockroach droppings off the floor and out of cracks, then seal the clean cracks with caulking or weather sealants
- Store food and garbage inside sealed containers
- Don't let dirty dishes sit out all night or let scraps collect in kitchen sink drains
- Empty and clean pet food and water dishes after pets have eaten — don't leave pet food out overnight
- Clean out litter boxes every day
- Clean behind stoves, moveable cabinets and refrigerators regularly
- Seal the spaces around pipes, wires and window frames and under doors

TRIGGERS

Indoor molds

Molds grow in dark, damp, stuffy places. If molds make your asthma worse:

- Keep your home dry. Fix leaks right away, and check for dry rot often. If your house is damp, use a dehumidifier
- Install an exhaust fan in the bathroom. Clean shower curtain, walls, tub, toilet and tiles with bleach at least once a month
- Dry wet clothing and linens right away
- Clean up spills right away
- Check stored food for mold
- Avoid cellars, basements, storage rooms, wood cabins, antique stores and thrift shops

Pollen and outdoor molds

Pollen and outdoor molds can be troublesome for people with asthma. They are at their peak during the fall and spring allergy seasons. During the allergy seasons:

- Keep the windows of your house and car shut — use the air conditioner instead
- Don't hang clothes outside to dry, they can collect pollen and molds
- Don't mow the lawn. Avoid freshly cut grass, as mowing stirs up pollen and molds
- Ask someone without asthma to cut down the weeds near your home

- Wear a facemask when gardening
- Try to stay indoors in the middle of the day and on windy days
- Try taking vacations in low-pollen areas such as the seashore

Sprays, smoke and strong odors

It may be difficult to completely protect yourself from these triggers, but to reduce their effects:

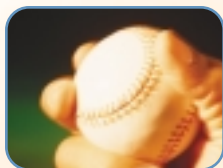
- Don't buy spray products such as deodorant, hair spray, insect spray or spray cleaning products. Use products in pumps or pour bottles instead
- Don't use a wood-burning stove, kerosene heater or fireplace. If you must, make sure the smoke is blown outdoors
- Turn on the exhaust fan or open the windows when cooking
- Avoid products with strong smells such as perfume, makeup, powder, talc and room fresheners
- Stay away from strong-smelling disinfectants, ammonia, chlorine, floor wax and paint
- If you must use these products, wear gloves on your hands and a mask over your nose and mouth

Health Net has a variety of resources to help you **Win.**



More asthma triggers

- **Vacuum cleaning:** ask or hire someone to vacuum for you. If you must vacuum, wear a face mask. You can also try a double-layered or micro filter bag or a vacuum with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate) filter
- **The flu:** get a flu shot every year
- **Sulfites in food:** avoid foods like wine, beer and dried fruit. Check food labels for “sulfites” and “metabisulfates” and don’t eat foods that have them
- **Cold air:** wear a scarf across your nose and mouth when it’s cold
- **Medicine:** ask your doctor whether there are any medicines you should avoid
- **Exercise:** follow the guidelines in the Exercising with Asthma section of this guide. When you are fit, you breathe easier and your lungs are stronger



EXERCISING WITH ASTHMA

Everyone with asthma should exercise — even people with exercise-induced asthma. When you are fit, you breathe easier and have fewer asthma symptoms.

EXERCISE MEDICINES

If exercise triggers your asthma, you may be instructed to:

- Take puffs of a short-acting bronchodilator or other medicine before and/or during exercise
- Increase your use of long-term medicines

TYPES OF EXERCISE

Sports to try

Water sports and sports that require only short bursts of energy are good choices. Sports to try to include:

- Baseball
- Golf
- Slow biking
- Swimming
- Walking

Sports to avoid

Avoid sports that require constant, heavy activity such as:

- Aerobics
- Basketball
- Hockey
- Long-distance running
- Soccer

EXERCISE DO'S AND DON'T'S

DO check with your doctor before starting a new or more advanced exercise program.

Don't exercise when you feel sick or very tired.

DO drink plenty of fluids before, during and after exercise.

Don't suddenly start or stop exercising. Warm up for 15 minutes before and cool down for 15 minutes after.

DO use your bronchodilator if you notice asthma symptoms.

Don't forget to monitor your breathing with your peak flow meter to see how exercise is affecting your asthma.

DO try to exercise indoors where the air is warm and there are few triggers.

Don't exercise on busy streets if you exercise outside. Stick to neighborhood streets and quiet country roads where there is less pollution.

DO breathe in slowly through your nose while exercising to warm and moisten the cold air. Cold, dry air can make asthma worse.

Don't exercise on hot, humid days when ozone levels are high.

DO exercise regularly.