



Breathe well, live well



Staying healthy when you have asthma

Having certain lung infections early in your life can make you more likely to develop asthma. So can being around tobacco smoke and other allergy triggers (allergens) at a young age.¹ Your family history also plays a part. If one or both of your parents have asthma, you are likely to have it, too.

Managing asthma

Asthma causes the airways in the lungs to swell up. This can make it hard to breathe. It can also cause coughing, wheezing and chest tightness.

When asthma “flares up,” it’s called an asthma attack. These attacks can be mild or severe. In some cases they can be deadly.¹

You can take steps to make living with asthma easier. You and your doctor will make a plan to keep your asthma under control. You’ll have a plan for normal days and an emergency plan for when you have asthma attacks. Your doctor can help you find out what triggers your attacks and decide what kind of medication you need.

If you have asthma attacks more often or they’re getting worse, see your doctor to change your treatment plan.

What happens during an asthma attack?

If you have asthma, your airways are always a bit swollen. That makes you react to triggers more than other people do. Asthma triggers irritate the airways – like cold air, stress and things you’re allergic to.²

When you’re exposed to a trigger:

- Your airways may swell up more than normal.
- Your airways may make more mucus than normal.
- Your muscles around the airways may tighten.

All of these changes keep you from getting enough air into your lungs – and getting enough oxygen in your blood. This can prevent vital organs from working, which can cause death.



*Your plan may or may not cover peak flow meters. For details about what your plan does and does not cover, check your Certificate of Coverage or call the Customer Service phone number on your ID card.

1 Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America website: Asthma Facts and Figures (accessed March 2015): aafa.org

2 National Heart Lung and Blood Institute website: Health Topics: Asthma (accessed March 2015): www.nlm.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma

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If you have asthma, your doctor may talk to you about:

- A quick-relief drug or long-term control drug that may be right for you.
- A peak flow meter, a small tool that measures how quickly and forcefully you can breathe out after taking a deep breath. It can give you an early warning that an asthma attack is about to happen.

Also, you and your doctor will work together to create an action plan. The plan has two parts. Part one is a plan for normal days. Part two is an emergency plan for when you have attacks. Once you have a plan, pay close attention to your asthma to make sure it does not get worse.

Is your asthma under control?

If you have asthma attacks more often or they're getting worse, see your doctor to change your treatment plan. Other signs that your asthma is not well controlled are:²

- You are losing sleep.
- You are missing school or work.
- Your peak flow meter shows a low number, or the number changes a lot from day to day.
- You have to use your quick-relief inhaler more often. More than twice a week is too often.
- Your medicines don't seem to work well anymore.
- You have to go to your doctor or the emergency room because of an attack.
- You have to stay in the hospital because of your asthma.

Learn more and find helpful tools for living with asthma at WebMD's Asthma Health Center at webmd.com.

What can cause an asthma attack?

Your doctor can help you figure out what triggers your asthma attacks. The most common ones are:²

- Animal dander
- Cigarette smoke
- Cockroaches
- Cold air or changes in weather
- Dust mites
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD); heartburn
- Infections like colds, bronchitis or pneumonia
- Medicines like aspirin and beta blockers
- Mold
- Pollen
- Pollution
- Stress, laughing hard, crying
- Strong smells from painting, cooking, perfumes, etc.

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