

# How to Care for Asthma

## Asthma

Asthma is a breathing disorder that causes the small airways in your lungs to become inflamed or swollen. It may also lead to airway spasms. Both of these conditions narrow the airway and make it hard for you to breathe.

Asthma is chronic (lasts a long time). With the right asthma action plan and medicines, you can have an active life. The following is for both adults and children.

## Medicines

- Medicine helps open your breathing tubes. Two common kinds are:
  - **controllers.** These are used every day to help prevent your airway from getting inflamed. They may be called anti-inflammatories. They include long-acting beta<sub>2</sub>-agonists, sustained release beta<sub>2</sub>-agonists and inhaled steroids.
  - **rescuers (relievers).** These are used to keep an asthma flare-up from getting worse. They are also called bronchodilators.
- These medicines come in the form of an inhaler or nebulizer. Follow the instructions for using medicine.
- Your heart rate may increase or you may feel jittery right after taking medicine. This may last for about one hour. Talk with your health care provider if this happens.

## Food

- Eat healthful foods, such as lean meats, low-fat dairy, fruits and vegetables, and whole wheat breads and cereals).
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of liquids a day to help thin the mucus. Water is a good choice.

## Activity

- Get up and out of bed. Your lungs can expand fully when you are standing. This will help you breathe easier and help you get better faster.
- Slowly increase your activity. Your lungs need time to heal.
- Limit activities that increase coughing or cause you to be short of breath.
- To “exercise” your lungs, take deep breaths and cough 5 to 6 times every hour while you are awake. Take a deep breath and hold it as long as you can. Push the air out of your lungs with a deep, strong cough.

## Do Not Use Tobacco

- Using any form of tobacco, including electronic nicotine delivery systems, is hard on your body.
- If you need help quitting, talk with your doctor, visit [smokefree.gov](http://smokefree.gov), or call the tobacco intervention program at:
  - Abbott Northwestern Hospital (612-863-1648)
  - Mercy Hospital (763-236-8008)
  - River Falls Area Hospital (715-307-6075).

## Asthma Triggers

There are some “triggers” which can make asthma worse. Look around your living space for any of these triggers:

- car exhaust and other air pollutants
- smoke from tobacco, fireplaces, fire pits and bonfires

*(over)*

- cold air
- chemical sprays
- perfumes, scented deodorants and other strong odors
- sulfites in food and other food allergies
- allergy triggers such as animal dander, dust mites, mold, pollen and cockroaches.

This is not a complete list. You or your child may have different triggers.

## Early Warning Signs of Asthma Attacks

There are early warning signs to watch for that might signal an asthma attack. Some of these may be worse at night. They include:

- having a tight chest or shortness of breath
- coughing
- not wanting to participate in usual activities
- change in your or your child's peak flow reading
- feeling weak
- having a runny nose
- sneezing and watery eyes
- having a dry mouth
- having a headache
- having dark circles under your or your child's eyes
- feeling nervous, grumpy or other mood swings.

## What to Do When Early Warning Signs Appear

If you have or your child has any early warning signs, do the following.

- Follow your asthma action plan.
- Remove any known asthma triggers.

- Slow down for several hours.
- Drink a glass of lukewarm water.
- Take your rescue medicine.
- Make sure your child tells an adult if he or she has early warning signs.
- Call your health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

## When To Call Your Health Care Provider

Call your health care provider if you have or your child has **any** of these:

- breathing very hard or very fast
- nostrils wide open
- ribs show, body is hunched
- feeling anxious due to breathing.

Call your health care provider if you have or your child has any of these other symptoms:

- upper respiratory symptoms, such as yellow or green mucus, coughing or shortness of breath
- flu-like symptoms, such as fever, cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose or muscle or body aches
- temperature higher than 101.5 F
- vomiting or can't keep medicine down
- sudden increase in feeling jittery.

## When To Call 911

Call 911 **right away** if:

- breathing does not improve
- you or your child cannot talk
- you or your child gasps for air
- you or your child sweats
- you have or your child has blue lips.