

LIVING WITH ASTHMA

Know your triggers. Control your symptoms.



If you have asthma, it can be difficult to breathe sometimes. It can cause your airways to swell and narrow. Affecting people of all ages, asthma often starts in childhood. It can be a minor problem in your life or a major one that may even lead to life-threatening attacks. But it's important to know that with proper treatment, asthma can be controlled.¹

Signs and symptoms

Asthma symptoms vary from person to person. Here are some of the common signs and symptoms of asthma.²

› Coughing

Often worse at night or early in the morning, making it hard to sleep.

› Wheezing

A whistling or squeaky sound that occurs when you breathe.

› Chest tightness

It may feel like something is squeezing or sitting on your chest.

› Shortness of breath

You may feel out of breath, like you can't catch your breath or like you can't get air out of your lungs.

Pay attention to your symptoms²

- › How often your symptoms occur and how severe they are may vary over time from being mildly annoying to affecting your daily routine.

- › Severe symptoms can be fatal. It's important to treat symptoms when you first notice them so they don't become severe.
- › With proper treatment, most people who have asthma can expect to have few, if any, symptoms.

Common triggers²

Many things can worsen or trigger asthma symptoms. Your doctor can help you identify those things (sometimes called triggers) that may cause your asthma to flare up. They may include:²

- › Allergens
 - Dust
 - Animal fur
 - Cockroaches
 - Mold
 - Pollen from trees, grasses and flowers
- › Irritants
 - Cigarette smoke
 - Air pollution
 - Chemicals or dust
 - Sprays (such as hair spray)
- › Strong emotions and stress

Together, all the way.®



Common triggers continued

- › Medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen and naproxen
- › Sulfites in foods and drinks
- › Physical activity, including exercise
- › Viral upper respiratory infections, such as colds

Other health conditions can also make your asthma harder to manage. These could include sinus infections, reflux disease and sleep apnea.

When to see a doctor

- › If you have frequent coughing or wheezing that lasts for more than a few days or have other asthma symptoms, it's important to see your doctor. Early treatment may help keep your asthma from getting worse and prevent long-term damage to your lungs.¹
- › Always follow your doctor's order's and work on keeping your asthma under control.
- › If your symptoms are not improving and getting worse, see your doctor right away. You may notice that your medication doesn't seem to be working or that you are using your inhaler more frequently. Don't ever take more medication without your doctor's approval. It can make things worse.
- › Your asthma may change over time so make sure to see your doctor regularly.
- › Ask your doctor about when you need emergency treatment. Signs of an emergency include:¹
 - Your wheezing and shortness of breath gets rapidly worse
 - There is no improvement after using your quick-relief inhaler
 - You are short of breath even when you are doing minimal physical activity

Tests

Your doctor may conduct the following tests to help diagnose your asthma and identify other conditions that may worsen it:

- › Lung function test
- › Chest x-ray
- › Evaluation for heartburn and a reflux disease called GERD

- › Allergy tests - to see if allergies may trigger your asthma symptoms
- › Sinus evaluation

Treatment

Asthma is treated with two types of medicines: long-term control and quick-relief medicines. Most medicines are taken using an inhaler. An inhaler allows the medicine to go directly to your lungs.

- › **Long-term control medicines** help reduce airway inflammation and prevent asthma symptoms, but don't offer quick relief from symptoms.

If your doctor prescribes a long-term control medicine, you will probably need to take it every day. Your symptoms will likely return or get worse if you stop.

- › **Quick-relief or "rescue" medicines** relieve asthma symptoms that may flare up. If you have asthma, you will need this type of medicine. These medicines act quickly to relax tight muscles around your airways. This allows the airways to open up so air can flow through them.

Carry your quick-relief inhaler with you at all times in case you need it. Make sure anyone caring for your child has their quick-relief medicines, too.

Living with asthma

- › Although you can't prevent asthma, you can work with your doctor to develop a plan to live with it. Follow this plan and get regular check-ups. Take your medications and monitor the use of your self-inhaler.
- › Once your asthma triggers are identified, do your best to avoid them.
- › Monitor your breathing. Learn to recognize the signs when you might have an attack (such as slight coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath). Measure and record your peak airflow with a home peak flow meter. Work with your doctor on how to use this device.
- › Treat your attacks early so they don't become severe.
- › Work with your doctor to manage other health conditions that may affect your asthma.

Sources:

1. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. "Asthma." Web (last reviewed/last updated March 9, 2018).

2. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. "Asthma." <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/asthma> (accessed May 7, 2018).

This is general health information and not medical advice or services. Always consult with your doctor for appropriate examinations, treatment, testing, and health care recommendations.

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