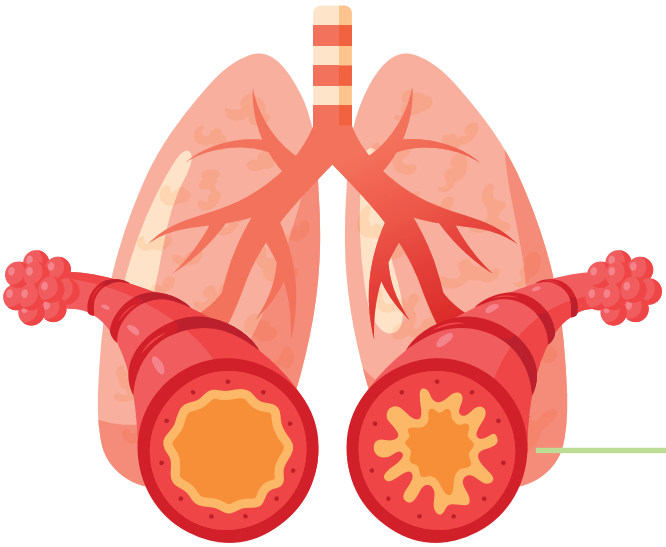
Keep **asthma** under control



Chances are you or someone you know suffers from asthma. According to the Centers for Disease Control,

1 in 13 Americans has asthma

which causes the airways that carry air from the nose and mouth to the lungs to swell and narrow.



normal airway irritated airway

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease that can't be cured, but its symptoms can be controlled.

Common symptoms include:

- Cough with or without phlegm production
- Pulling in of the skin between the ribs when breathing
- Shortness of breath that gets worse with exercise or activity
- Wheezing

What causes asthma?

Asthma is most likely caused by several factors. You are more likely to develop asthma if others in your family have it. Among those who are susceptible, being exposed to environmental factors, such as allergens, substances that cause an allergic reaction or infections, may increase the chance of developing asthma.

Asthma triggers

When you have asthma, certain "triggers" cause inflammation in the lungs and tightening of the chest. These triggers may include allergens such as:

pets

pollen

mold

dust

some foods or food additives

extreme hot or cold conditions

air pollution

tobacco smoke

strenuous physical activity

By avoiding or minimizing exposure to triggers, you can reduce the amount of medicine you need so you can work and play without struggling to catch your breath. But sometimes avoiding triggers isn't enough.

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Asthma relief

There are two main types of asthma medications – quick relief and long-term control – and both are important for treating your asthma.



Quick-relief medications

At the first sign of an asthma flare-up – such as coughing or wheezing – take a quick-relief medication to ease your symptoms. Also known as bronchodilators, they take effect in minutes, relaxing the muscles around your airways and allowing more airflow. Quick-relief inhalers may relieve symptoms, but they don't prevent episodes. Everyone with asthma needs a quick-relief medicine to help stop symptoms from becoming a full-blown asthma attack.

Remember:

- Don't rely on these medications for the day-to-day management of your asthma. If you need to use your quick-relief medicine more than twice per week, your asthma is not well controlled.
- If two puffs are prescribed, wait a full minute before taking the second puff.
- Talk to your doctor if you have difficulty using your inhaler. There may be a device (a spacer) to help give you more time to inhale the medication.



Long-term control medications

Take this medication daily to prevent airway inflammation and swelling. Long-term medications are preventive and work slowly over time.

Remember:

- In addition to avoiding triggers, using controller medication as directed helps prevent asthma flare-ups.
- Don't stop taking your long-term medication without discussing it with your doctor – your asthma may worsen.
- Steroids are also used as controller medications to treat asthma.



Many people with asthma need both quick-relief and long-term control medications. Work with your doctor to find the best treatment for your asthma.

May is National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month

Air Quality Awareness Week is May 4-8

World Asthma Day is May 7

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Managing your asthma

Do you sometimes wonder if your asthma is getting worse or becoming more out of control? Regardless of your age or how long you've had asthma, it's important to keep your symptoms in check.



Watch for these Symptoms

- Your asthma symptoms are worse (even a little) than they used to be in the daytime, nighttime or after exertion.
- You missed a day (or more) of work or school because of asthma symptoms.
- Your peak flow readings are lower than your normal readings.
- You are using your quick-relief inhaler more than two days a week or more than twice a month because of nighttime symptoms.
- You had to go to an urgent care center, the emergency room or the hospital because of an attack.
- You're having troublesome side effects from your asthma medication.

Do not ignore these signs! Make an appointment with your doctor today to talk about the symptoms you are experiencing. You may need a change in your medication or your environment to help you avoid exposure to triggers.



Do you need a specialist?

There are times when a referral to another doctor with expertise in asthma management is a good idea. In most cases, the referral will be to an allergist or a pulmonologist (lung specialist).

According to the Expert Panel from the National Asthma Education and Prevention Program (NAEPP), a referral for consultation or care to one of these specialists is recommended when:

- A life-threatening asthma attack occurred.
- Treatment goals can't be met after three to six months.
- The asthma symptoms are unusual or there is suspicion that the asthma diagnosis is incorrect.
- A complicating condition exists, such as acid reflux, severe sinus inflammation or another lung condition.
- More diagnostic testing, such as allergy tests or bronchoscopy is needed.
- Additional education and guidance are needed because the patient is having difficulty following the treatment plan or avoiding allergy triggers.
- The patient is being considered for immunotherapy.
- The patient is 0-4 years old and requires step 3 or step 4 care.
- The patient has needed more than two bursts of oral steroids in one year or has had an asthma flare-up that required hospitalization.

If any of these situations apply to you or your child, take an active role in obtaining an appointment with an asthma specialist. Don't hesitate to discuss the situation and your concerns with your health care provider. You will breathe easier as a result.

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