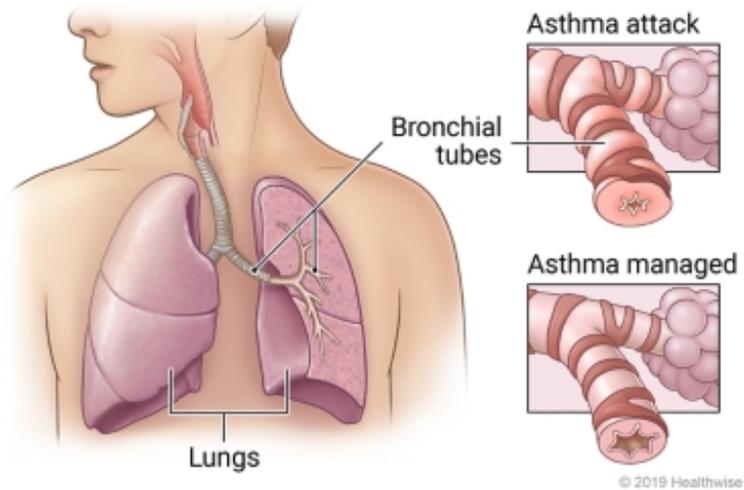


# Controlling Your Asthma: Care Instructions



## Your Care Instructions

Asthma is a long-term condition that affects your breathing. It causes the airways that lead to the lungs to swell. During an asthma attack, the airways swell and narrow. This makes it hard to breathe. You may wheeze or cough. If you have a bad attack, you may need emergency care.

There are two things to do to treat asthma.

- Control asthma over the long term.
- Treat attacks when they occur.

You and your doctor can make an asthma action plan. It tells you what medicines you need to take every day to control asthma symptoms and what to do if you have an asthma attack. Your asthma action plan can help prevent and treat attacks.

When you keep your asthma under control, you can prevent severe attacks and lasting damage to your airways. You need to treat your asthma even when you are not having symptoms. Although asthma is a lifelong disease, treatment can help control it and help you stay healthy.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

### To control asthma over the long term

#### Medicines

Controller medicines reduce swelling in your lungs. They also prevent asthma attacks. Take your controller medicine exactly as prescribed. Talk to your doctor if you have any problems with your medicine.

- Inhaled corticosteroid is a common and effective controller medicine. Using it the right way can prevent or reduce most side effects.
- Take your controller medicine every day, not just when you have symptoms. It helps prevent problems before they occur.
- Your doctor may prescribe another medicine that you use along with the corticosteroid. This is often a long-acting bronchodilator. Do not take this medicine by itself. Using a long-acting bronchodilator by itself can increase your risk of a severe or fatal asthma attack.
- Do not take inhaled corticosteroids or long-acting bronchodilators to stop an asthma attack that has already started. They don't work fast enough to help.
- Talk to your doctor before you use other medicines. Some medicines, such as aspirin, can cause asthma attacks in some people.

#### Education

- Learn what triggers an asthma attack. Avoid these triggers when you can. Common triggers include colds, smoke, air pollution, dust, pollen, mold, pets, cockroaches, stress, and cold air.
- Check yourself for asthma symptoms to know which step to follow in your action plan. Watch for things like being short of breath, having chest tightness, coughing, and wheezing. Also notice if symptoms wake you up at night or if you get tired quickly when you exercise.
- If you have a peak flow meter, use it to check how well you are breathing. It can help you know when an asthma attack is

going to occur. Then you can take medicine to prevent the asthma attack or make it less severe.

- Do not smoke or allow others to smoke around you. Avoid smoky places. Smoking makes asthma worse. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
- Avoid colds and the flu. Get a pneumococcal vaccine shot. If you have had one before, ask your doctor whether you need a second dose. Get a flu vaccine every year, as soon as it's available. If you must be around people with colds or the flu, wash your hands often.

## **To treat attacks when they occur**

Use your asthma action plan when you have an attack. Your quick-relief medicine will stop an asthma attack. It relaxes the muscles that get tight around the airways.

If your doctor prescribed corticosteroid pills to use during an attack, take them as directed. They may take hours to work, but they may shorten the attack and help you breathe better.

- Albuterol is an effective quick-relief inhaler.
- Take your quick-relief medicine exactly as prescribed.
- Always bring your asthma medicine with you when you travel.
- You may need to use quick-relief medicine before you exercise.
- Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.

## **When should you call for help?**

**Call** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You are having severe trouble breathing.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your symptoms do not get better after you have followed your asthma action plan.
- You cough up yellow, dark brown, or bloody mucus (sputum).

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your coughing and wheezing get worse.
- You need to use your quick-relief medicine on more than 2 days a week (unless it is just for exercise).
- You need help figuring out what is triggering your asthma attacks.

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