

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ASTHMA

In the Clinic
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What Is Asthma?

Asthma is an illness that affects the airways in your lungs and makes it hard to breathe. When you have asthma, tubes that bring air to the lungs become swollen. Being around certain substances that irritate your lungs, like smoke, dust, or mold, can trigger a reaction called an asthma attack.

What Are Symptoms?

Symptoms of asthma include:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Difficulty taking a deep breath
- Tightness in your chest

You may experience worsening symptoms when:

- Exercising
- Breathing irritants, such as smoke, pollen, or animal dander
- Breathing irritants at work, such as dust or fumes
- Taking aspirin and other medications

How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your clinician will ask you questions about your medical history and your symptoms and do a physical examination.
- You may have spirometry, which is a painless test that measures how much air you can breathe out and how fast you can breathe air out before and after using an inhaled medication.
- If you have unusual symptoms or your asthma is difficult to control with standard treatment, your clinician might refer you to a specialist.

How Is It Treated?

You can usually control your asthma through medication and by reducing exposure to triggers. Your clinician may prescribe several types of medicine, such as:

- An inhaled medicine that can quickly relieve symptoms during an asthma attack
- A different inhaled medicine you can take every day to prevent asthma attacks
- Medicines you can take by mouth to help when you are having an attack or to prevent attacks

Ask your clinician to watch you use your inhaled medications and provide feedback on your tech-



nique. More than half of patients do not take their inhaled medications correctly.

Nonmedical treatment of asthma includes identifying and reducing environmental triggers:

- Stop smoking, and avoid secondhand tobacco smoke
- Use air conditioners and dehumidifiers to reduce moisture in your home
- Remove carpets and limit fabric household items
- Remove allergenic pets from the home

Other things you can do include losing weight if you are overweight or obese, eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, and making sure other chronic conditions are well controlled.

Develop a written action plan with your clinician to help you understand how to keep your asthma under control, when and how to take your medicine, and when to get emergency help. This plan may include monitoring your peak flow rate with a simple meter that measures how well air moves out of your lungs. The reading on the meter and your symptoms can tell you when to start following the steps in your action plan. It will also help your clinician make decisions about your treatment and inform how to adjust your medications.

Questions for My Doctor

- What tests should I have to diagnose asthma?
- How can I prevent an asthma attack?
- Do I need an inhaler? Would you show me how to use it?
- Should I use a peak flow meter at home?
- Do I need a controller medication?
- What should I do if I have an asthma attack?
- When should I get emergency help?

For More Information



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National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/asthma

MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/asthma.html>

A tutorial on proper use of a metered-dose inhaler

<https://youtu.be/9ipqx4p5g>