

# Medication tips

## Asthma

### What does this handout cover?

This handout will help you learn how to control your asthma and prevent an asthma attack.

### What is asthma?<sup>1</sup>

Asthma is a long-term condition that affects your lungs. With asthma, the airways, or tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs, are inflamed. They become swollen and very sensitive. This can lead to asthma symptoms. The most common asthma symptoms are:

- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing

Sometimes, asthma symptoms are mild. They can go away on their own or after treatment with asthma medications. Other times, symptoms get worse and lead to an asthma attack.

### How can I control my asthma?<sup>1</sup>

#### Know your signs and symptoms

The signs and symptoms of asthma are not the same for everyone. It's important to know your signs and symptoms. Be sure to treat your asthma symptoms when you first notice them. This helps keep them from getting worse.

#### Stay away from triggers

Triggers are things that can make your asthma worse. They can also cause an asthma attack. Learn what your asthma triggers are, so you can stay away from them. Some triggers are:

- Air pollution
- Animal fur
- Chemical smells
- Dust or dust mites
- Mold
- Certain foods and drinks
- Tobacco smoke

#### Use a peak flow meter

A peak flow meter is a hand-held device that tracks how well your lungs are working. It can tell you if your asthma is under control. It can also help you find out if your medications are working or if you should call your doctor. Talk to your doctor about using a peak flow meter.

#### Make and follow an asthma action plan

An asthma action plan is a written guide to help you control your asthma. Work with your doctor to make an asthma action plan. It should tell you:

- What kind of symptoms to expect based on your peak flow meter results.
- What kind of asthma medications to take and when to take them.
- When you should call your doctor or go to the hospital.

## What are the different types of asthma medications?<sup>1</sup>

Asthma symptoms can be treated with two types of medications: rescue (or quick-relief) medications and long-term control medications.

**Quick-relief medications** work fast to help control asthma symptoms.

- They relax your airway muscles. This lets more air into your lungs, so you breathe easier.
- Use them when you first notice asthma symptoms.
- They can also be used 15 to 30 minutes before exercise to help with breathing.
- Tell your doctor if you're using these medications more than 2 times a week. It may be a sign that your asthma is not well-controlled.
- Examples of quick-relief medications are:
  - ProAir<sup>®</sup> HFA (albuterol)
  - Proventil<sup>®</sup> HFA (albuterol)
  - Ventolin<sup>®</sup> HFA (albuterol)
  - Xopenex HFA<sup>®</sup> (levalbuterol)

**Long-term control medications** help prevent asthma symptoms.

- They don't give quick relief of asthma symptoms.
- Use long-term control medications every day or as your doctor tells you.
- There are several types of long-term control medications. Each works in a different way to help control your asthma.
- Examples of long-term control medications are:
  - Asmanex<sup>®</sup> (mometasone)
  - Flovent<sup>®</sup> Diskus or HFA (fluticasone)
  - Pulmicort Flexhaler<sup>®</sup> (budesonide)
  - Accolate<sup>®</sup> (zafirlukast)
  - Singulair<sup>®</sup> (montelukast)
  - Advair<sup>®</sup> Diskus or HFA (fluticasone/salmeterol)
  - Symbicort<sup>®</sup> (budesonide/formoterol)
- It's important to rinse your mouth with water after using these types of inhaler medications.

## How do I take my asthma medications?

- There are different ways to take asthma medications. Some medications are inhaled by breathing in. Others are swallowed as pills. Ask your doctor or pharmacist how to take your medications.
- Be sure to take your asthma medications as directed by your doctor. Not taking your medications the right way can make asthma symptoms worse.
- Don't change the amount of medication you take. Don't stop taking your medications without first talking to your doctor.
- Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you can't afford your asthma medications.
- Keep all of your doctor appointments so your doctor can track your asthma symptoms.

## How can I remember to take my medications?<sup>2</sup>

Here are some tips to help you remember:

- Make a list of all your medications. Include when and how to take them.
- Keep track of how much medication you have left. Mark your calendar so you'll remember to refill your medications before they run out.
- Take your long-term control medication at the same time each day. For example, when you brush your teeth or eat breakfast.
- Ask a friend or family member to remind you. Or set an alarm clock for when it's time to take your medications.

- Keep your medications in a place you can see easily, such as on your nightstand.
- You can set up reminders to take specific medications at specific times and to refill your medications on time.

Being organized will help you remember to take your medications. Taking your medications as directed can help you stay out of the emergency room and hospital.

**Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America** | 1-800-7-ASTHMA (1-800-727-8462) | [aafa.org](https://aafa.org)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** | 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) | [cdc.gov/asthma](https://cdc.gov/asthma)

**American Lung Association** | 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872) | [lung.org](https://lung.org)

<sup>1</sup> National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute website. What Is Asthma? [nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma/](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma/). Accessed October 23, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> American Lung Association website. Asthma. [lung.org/lung-disease/asthma/](https://lung.org/lung-disease/asthma/). Accessed October 23, 2017.

The information in this educational tool does not substitute for the medical advice, diagnosis or treatment of your physician. Always seek the help of your physician or qualified health provider for any questions you may have regarding your medical condition.