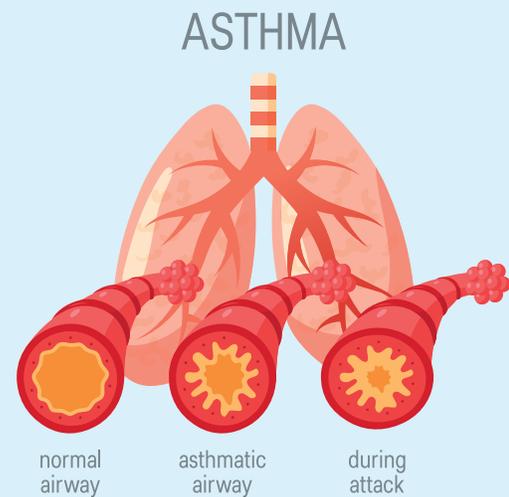


# Better You living with asthma: Don't take my breath away.



The exact cause of asthma is unknown and there is no cure. However, most people with asthma can control their symptoms by avoiding things that trigger an asthma attack and by taking their medication as prescribed.



## What is asthma?

In people who have asthma, something causes the airways of the lungs to narrow or become blocked, making it harder to breathe. Normally, the airways of the lungs are fully open when we breathe and air moves in and out freely.

### With asthma:

- The lining of the airways swells and becomes inflamed
- Mucus clogs the airways
- Muscles tighten around the airways
- These changes narrow the airways and breathing becomes difficult, like trying to breathe through a very small straw



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Your Health Solutions Partner



## Assess your control

Three questions to ask yourself about your asthma control:

1. How many times a week do you use your rescue inhaler?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How many times a month do you wake up at night due to symptoms? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many times per year do you refill your rescue inhaler? \_\_\_\_\_

**If you answered more than two for any of the above questions, let your health care provider know.**



## How to use a peak flow meter

**Your peak flow meter is a tool to help you monitor your asthma control.**

The first time you use it, ideally you are feeling well without any asthma symptoms. Slide the marker to the bottom of the scale. Stand up straight and take in a deep breath, close your mouth around the mouth piece, and blow as fast and as hard as you can. Note the marker number and write it down. Wait a few minutes and repeat. Wait another few minutes and repeat again. Average those three numbers. This will be your “ideal” peak flow reading. When you don’t feel well, or have symptoms, use the peak flow meter to see what your readings are. You and your provider will set parameters to follow.



## Proper use of an inhaler

Remove the cap. Shake the inhaler, exhale, place your lips around the mouth piece, and press the canister to release the medication while breathing in with a sure, steady inhale.

**IMPORTANT:** Hold that inhale for at least 10 seconds before you exhale. If you are doing two puffs, wait a full minute then repeat the entire process. If you are using a corticosteroid inhaler (controller), when you are done with the inhaler, rinse your mouth with water and spit out that rinse water.

# Ways to reduce your exposure to known asthma triggers:



## **Dust mites**

These tiny insects live in dust and are found on mattresses, pillows, carpets, and upholstered furniture. Dust mite droppings may trigger your asthma. To keep the levels down wash linens every week in HOT water. Use special dust proof mattress and pillow covers and use a dehumidifier. Remove carpeting and upholstered furniture, especially in the bedroom.



## **Cockroaches**

Roaches can leave droppings that are known asthma triggers. Keep your kitchen and bathrooms clean and take out the trash daily. Store food in airtight containers. If cockroaches are a problem, consider using treatment, but don't be present when/if chemicals are used.



## **Animal dander**

Skin, fur, or feathers from our furry or feathered friends can cause your airways to swell and become inflamed. If possible, find a new home for your pet. If this is not possible keep your pet out of the bedroom and off upholstered furniture and carpets. Wash your hands after petting your furry friend and bathe your pets once a week.



## **Food allergies**

Find out if you have them, as they can cause asthma flare-ups. Avoid foods with sulfites. Learn what you are sensitive to and avoid these foods. When eating out, ask how foods are prepared and if they might be contaminated (for example if you are having French fries and they are fried in the same oil as the shellfish).



## **Molds**

Found both indoors and outdoors. Using a dehumidifier can help. Keep tubs, sinks, and other mold and mildew sites clean. Consider a cleaner with bleach. Avoid damp places like basements, bathrooms, and closets. Keep furnace and air conditioner filters clean and have your air ducts cleaned. Avoid outdoor mold such as wet leaves and garden debris.



## **Cigarette, pipe, and cigar smoke**

(this includes e-cigs and hookah). Don't smoke and avoid secondhand smoke. Avoid fireplaces and wood-burning stoves. Don't use kerosene heaters.

# Try to reduce your exposure to these known irritants:



## Items with a strong odor

Anything with a strong odor can be an irritant. This can be anything from cleaning supplies to perfumes, paints, lotions, and even hairspray. Try to use scent-free cleaning products. Avoid scented candles, and if someone is painting, steer clear of the area until the odor is gone.



## Environment

Air pollution and the weather can play a role in your lung health. If the weather is very hot or very cold, learn what to do to protect yourself (for example, if it's cold, wear a scarf over your mouth). You can also check the air quality and if the pollen or pollution is really bad, choose to stay in. Check the local air quality to see what is going on in your area.

# Other triggers and tips:



## Sinus problems

or upper respiratory tract infections, like colds or the flu, can make your lungs more sensitive. Get a flu shot every year. Wash your hands frequently during flu season or when around sick people and avoid them if you can. Treat cold symptoms immediately—talk to your health care provider about preferred treatment.



## Stress or anxiety

can make symptoms worse. Learn how to relax and practice relaxation breathing techniques. One such technique is called belly breathing. Place your hands on your belly with your fingertips touching and breathe in deeply and slowly, moving your hands away from each other as you inhale slowly and your belly expands. Try this exercise for 1–2 minutes initially then build to longer periods.



## If you have exercise-induced asthma

talk with your health care provider about what you should do. Some may have you pre-treat with an inhaler. The recommendations are to start slow and always warm up and cool down. Do not push yourself to extremes. Symptoms typically happen a few minutes after starting exercise. The symptoms include shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing and tightness in the chest. You CAN exercise with asthma if you follow your medical instructions, and recommendations.



## Awareness at work

If a coworker is spraying perfume in the bathroom, or using strong chemicals let them know you have reactions to them. If you don't feel comfortable saying something, let your HR person know so that an announcement can be made to all employees. If your symptoms flare up while at work and you aren't able to determine why, consult your employee health services for a work place evaluation.



## Keep a log

In all cases, keeping a log of when you have symptoms can greatly assist your provider in determining what is happening. Be sure to include the location, time of day, what you were doing, and any other information that could be helpful to determine if you were exposed to an irritant or a trigger.

# Asthma Action Plan

Talk to your provider about an Asthma Action Plan. If you don't have one, fill it out with your provider. This is especially helpful for children.

## Green

Means you're doing well and should keep up the maintenance plan.

## Yellow

Means you should use caution and try to determine what may be causing problems. You may want to call your provider or get in for an appointment.

## Red

Means you should be evaluated as soon as possible. This is considered emergent.

5 different Asthma Action Plans can be found at the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/actionplan.html>

The plan shown is from the Asthma and Allergy foundation of America website: <https://www.aafa.org/media/1601/asthma-action-plan-aafa.pdf>



Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
aafa.org

## ASTHMA ACTION PLAN

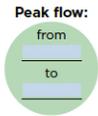
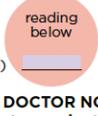
Name: _____	Date: _____
Doctor: _____	Medical Record #: _____
Doctor's Phone #: Day _____	Night/Weekend _____
Emergency Contact: _____	
Doctor's Signature: _____	

Personal Best Peak Flow: \_\_\_\_\_



**GREEN** means Go Zone!  
Use preventive medicine.  
**YELLOW** means Caution Zone!  
Add quick-relief medicine.  
**RED** means Danger Zone!  
Get help from a doctor.

The colors of a traffic light will help you use your asthma medicines.

GO	Use these daily controller medicines:		
	MEDICINE	HOW MUCH	HOW OFTEN/WHEN
<p><b>You have <i>all</i> of these:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breathing is good</li> <li>• No cough or wheeze</li> <li>• Sleep through the night</li> <li>• Can work &amp; play</li> </ul> <p>Peak flow: </p>			
	For asthma with exercise, take:		
CAUTION	Continue with green zone medicine and add:		
	MEDICINE	HOW MUCH	HOW OFTEN/ WHEN
<p><b>You have <i>any</i> of these:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First signs of a cold</li> <li>• Exposure to known trigger</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Mild wheeze</li> <li>• Tight chest</li> <li>• Coughing at night</li> </ul> <p>Peak flow: </p>			
	CALL YOUR ASTHMA CARE PROVIDER.		
DANGER	Take these medicines and call your doctor now.		
	MEDICINE	HOW MUCH	HOW OFTEN/WHEN
<p><b>Your asthma is getting worse fast:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicine is not helping</li> <li>• Breathing is hard &amp; fast</li> <li>• Nose opens wide</li> <li>• Trouble speaking</li> <li>• Ribs show (in children)</li> </ul> <p>Peak flow: </p>			

GET HELP FROM A DOCTOR NOW! Your doctor will want to see you right away. It's important! If you cannot contact your doctor, go directly to the emergency room. **DO NOT WAIT.** Make an appointment with your asthma care provider within two days of an ER visit or hospitalization.