

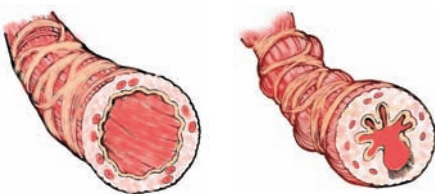


*You can control your asthma.
Don't let it control you.*

What is asthma?

Do you wonder what asthma is? Asthma is a lung condition that can make it hard to breathe. It often starts in childhood and continues through adulthood. When you have asthma it is harder for oxygen to get into your lungs. Your airways are inflamed and filled with mucus. Airways are more sensitive in people with asthma. Your airways react to things that trigger asthma, which may cause an asthma attack. Asthma can't be cured but it can be treated in a lot of different ways.

Airways



normal

asthma

What makes my asthma worse?

It's important to know what makes your asthma worse. These are called your asthma triggers. Common triggers are:

- smoke from cigarettes, fireplaces, incense
- allergies to dust mites, pets (with fur or feathers) cockroaches, molds and pollens
- colds and flu, or infections like bronchitis
- strong odors from household cleaning products, perfumes, or other strong scents
- smog and air pollution
- exercise

Controlling my asthma

1. Avoid things that trigger your asthma.
2. Take your medicines as directed by your doctor, even if you are feeling well.
3. Always carry your rescue inhaler and spacer with you.
4. Pay attention to your symptoms and take action quickly; use your action plan. (For more information on creating a plan, see second side of this page.)
5. If exercise makes you cough, wheeze (whistling sound when you breathe), or have a tight chest, talk to your doctor. You may need to take your asthma medicine before you are active.

Keep track of your asthma symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, or tightness in your chest. You can use a notebook

to record when and where you are when you have symptoms. Allergy testing can tell you which allergens you should avoid. Ask your doctor if allergy testing would be helpful.

Learning how to control asthma is the only way to prevent asthma attacks. Once you know how to control your asthma, you can live a healthy and active life.

Having asthma doesn't mean that you can't do things that your friends who don't have asthma do. It *does* mean you'll need to do things to take good care of yourself.

How do I know my asthma is in good control?

You should not have any asthma symptoms when your asthma is in good control – no coughing, wheezing, or chest tightness. You should not have to visit the emergency room, or experience asthma attacks during the day or night. You should be able to participate in sports and PE without any trouble breathing.

What kinds of medicines can help control my asthma?

Asthma medicine is not used to cure asthma. But it can prevent and help control your asthma. You should always remember to take your medicine.

There are three major types of medications you can take to help control your asthma.

Asthma medications

- **controller** – prevents asthma attacks from occurring.
- **quick relief** – provides fast, but temporary relief of asthma symptoms.
- **burst medication** – oral steroids used for a severe asthma flare-up.

You can set an alarm on your cell phone to help you remember when to take your medicines.



Devices for taking your medications

Most asthma medicines are inhaled so that they go directly into your lungs. There are three methods for taking inhaled medicines:

- metered dose inhalers
- dry-powder inhalers
- nebulizer

Always use a spacer with your metered dose inhaler (MDI). A spacer gets more of the medicine into your lungs and less in your mouth and throat.

My asthma action plan

Your doctor will work with you to create a written plan. There are three treatment zones that are color coded like a traffic light. The plan tells you which medicines to use when you are:

- in good control (green zone)
- having a mild or moderate flare-up (yellow zone)
- having a severe flare-up (red zone)

Use your peak flow meter

Asthma does not stay the same all the time. A peak flow meter measures air flow. It tells you whether your



breathing tubes are open enough for normal breathing. Your peak flow reading can let you know if a flare-up is starting and it can help you figure out how bad the flare up is. Ask your doctor about getting a peak flow meter.

Tell your friends you have asthma. They can help.

Talk to them and tell them how asthma is affecting your life and how they can help you. Having asthma is nothing to be embarrassed about. Telling your friends can be difficult, but having their support can help you feel better. Here is how your friends can help:

- Let your friends know what triggers your asthma so that they can help you to avoid your triggers.

- If you are having trouble breathing, your friends can get help quickly

Find it hard to talk to your friends about asthma? Talk to your doctor or a trusted adult about this. They'll help you.

Facts about asthma

You are not the only one: Asthma is one of the top chronic diseases in young adults.

- In the U.S., 6.5 million children under age 18 have been diagnosed with asthma.
- Asthma is the third leading cause of hospitalization among persons under the age of 15.
- Asthma is the most common cause of school absenteeism due to chronic disease.

Other resources

- At kp.org/asthma you can find lots more information about managing asthma.
- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, podcasts to reduce stress and much more.
- Contact or visit your local Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, Healthy Living programs, and other resources.