ASTHMA ANSWERS:
How to Manage Your Asthma and Avoid Symptom Triggers
Table of Contents

CHAPTER 01
Managing Your Asthma—When Do You Need More Help?

CHAPTER 02
Next Steps: Keeping Your Asthma Symptoms in Check

CHAPTER 03
Everyday Asthma—Essential Tips for Better Breathing

CHAPTER 04
Where Do You Go From Here?
MANAGING YOUR ASTHMA—

When Do You Need More Help?
Asthma doesn’t have a cure, but it can be managed.

You’re Not Alone...
If you have asthma, you’re not alone. Asthma affects about 24 million people in the United States.

Many people with asthma still suffer from symptoms, even when they take an asthma maintenance medication.

WHO HAS ASTHMA?
No matter what your age, there are still things you can do to prevent asthma symptoms.
6 out of 10 people don’t realize there could be more they and their doctors can do to manage asthma.

Make sure you have a clear picture of how well your asthma is being managed.

How to tell when you need more help with your asthma

If you’ve had asthma for a while, certain asthma symptoms may seem “normal” to you because you’re used to them. But these “normal” symptoms could be a sign that you need more help managing your asthma. You could also have a greater risk of needing to go to the emergency room or being hospitalized due to asthma.

Signs that you may need more help with your asthma include:

- Needing to use your rescue inhaler 2 days a week or more—this doesn’t include using your inhaler to prevent breathing problems during exercise
- Having more than 1 asthma attack that required oral steroids in the last year

If you notice any of these signs, check if you’re following your treatment plan correctly.

But what if you’re following your treatment plan and still have asthma symptoms? In that case, talk to your doctor about what else you can do to better manage your asthma.
Asthma symptoms can be disruptive for teenagers

Do you have a teenager at home? If so, it’s important to understand the impact that asthma symptoms can have on your teen’s daily life. For example:

- 1 in 3 teens with asthma has had unscheduled office visits to treat worsening of their asthma symptoms
- 1 in 4 teens with asthma has experienced asthma symptoms severe enough to cause them to miss school

If this sounds like your teen, there may be more you can do. Talk to his or her doctor.

Reduce Your Risk of Asthma Attacks

Did you know that you can reduce your risk of asthma attacks by following your treatment plan and avoiding asthma triggers?

Not following your treatment plan greatly increases your risk of having an asthma attack. If you’re having trouble following your treatment plan, talk to your doctor. He or she may be able to tailor it to better meet your needs.

Avoiding triggers is also an important part of preventing asthma attacks. Common asthma triggers include pet dander, air pollution, cigarette smoke, and dust mites. You may also have seasonal triggers such as pollen, molds, and cold or dry air.

See our tips on ways to avoid asthma attack triggers on page 13.

High levels of stress and intense emotions can alter your breathing patterns, triggering an attack.

Work with your doctor to find ways to fight stress.
## Asthma Triggers

**HOW MANY OF THESE ASTHMA TRIGGERS AFFECT YOU?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colds or the flu</th>
<th>Paint</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pets and other animals</td>
<td>Aerosols and sprays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dust or dust mites</td>
<td>Cleaning products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mold</td>
<td>Strong emotions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pollen</td>
<td>Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood smoke</td>
<td>Aspirin or other medications</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cigarette smoke</td>
<td>Certain foods or food additives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
<td>Cold air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn leaves</td>
<td>Other changes in the weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong odors or perfumes</td>
<td>Changes in your hormones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Did you know there were so many asthma triggers?

**Learn specific steps you can take to manage or avoid these triggers on page 13.**
NEXT STEPS:
Keeping Your Asthma Symptoms in Check
Keep track of your asthma symptoms

Tracking your symptoms can help you manage your asthma. It can help you identify your asthma triggers and spot patterns in your symptoms. Tracking your symptoms will also help you talk to your doctor about your asthma.

How much information you track is up to you. It’s a good idea to start with the 3 Ws:

- **What** symptoms you had and your peak flow, if you use a peak flow meter
- **When** your symptoms occurred
- **Where** you were when your symptoms occurred

If you know **why** you experienced asthma symptoms, note that as well.

Depending on the method you use, and how much space you have, here are some things you may want to track:

- whether or not you took your medication
- any asthma triggers you were around
- if you were unable to do any of your usual activities

Don’t rely on your memory. Fill out your symptom tracker every day.

There are lots of different tools you can use to track your asthma symptoms. If you have a smart phone, an app may be a convenient way to keep track of your asthma symptoms. Or you may prefer a more low-tech solution, like a notebook, calendar, or daily planner. Whichever method you choose, the most important thing is to be consistent.
Build a Partnership With Your Doctor

Building a partnership with your doctor will always be important. But it’s especially important if you have moderate or severe asthma.

You’ll be able to prevent asthma symptoms better if you take an active role in managing your condition. Here are some ways to do that:

- When you see your doctor, don’t be afraid to ask questions and express any concerns you have.
- If you don’t understand why or how your doctor wants you to do something, speak up.
- Become involved in making decisions about your treatment.
- Ask about programs that can teach you skills that will help you manage your asthma.

Also tell your doctor about all of the methods you are using to manage your asthma, including:

- Medicines or treatments from other doctors
- Herbs, supplements, or over-the-counter medicines
- Techniques such as meditation, yoga, or breathing exercises

Did you know 1 in 10 adults with asthma is sensitive to aspirin and similar pain medications?

Your doctor can help you figure out if certain medications may trigger your asthma.
Talking to Your Doctor About Asthma

You and your doctor may approach asthma from different points of view. In order to manage asthma, it’s important for you both to be on the same page. To do that, it may help to explain what having asthma means to you. For example:

- What type and level of symptoms is “normal” for you?
- What activities do you avoid doing because of your asthma?
- How does asthma affect your sleep?
- How does asthma affect you emotionally?
- How does your asthma affect other members of your family?

In addition, your doctor may refer to the signs that you may need more help with your asthma that we discussed on page 5. However, you may also want to consider asking questions like these:

- What level of symptoms would your doctor consider normal?
- How active does your doctor think you can be when your asthma is better managed?
- What is your doctor’s overall goal for your treatment? Is it the same as your own goal?
Create an Asthma Action Plan

An asthma action plan is a document that you and your doctor write together. It is your personalized guide to managing your asthma on a daily basis. Your asthma action plan should be tailored to your specific needs and lifestyle.

Your asthma action plan will cover:

- how to manage your asthma on a daily basis
- what to do if your asthma gets worse

It should be detailed and list which medications to take, how much to take, and when to take them. Be sure to review your asthma action plan with your doctor at each follow-up visit and update it if needed.

If you don’t already have an asthma action plan, work with your doctor to create one. You can start by downloading this asthma action plan.
EVERYDAY ASTHMA—
Essential Tips for Better Breathing
Managing Your Asthma at Home

Your home is one of the places you spend the most time. It’s also the place where you can make the most changes to help manage your asthma.

There may be more triggers in your home than you realize: from pets and pests to mold and dust mites. But there are also many things you can do to reduce the presence of triggers in your home:

- If you have pets, keep them out of the bedroom and sleeping areas
- Limit the amount of carpeting and upholstered furniture in your home. If that isn’t possible, vacuum frequently
- Use allergen-impermeable covers for your pillow and mattress
- Wash bedding weekly in hot water (at least 130° F). If you can’t get the water hot enough, use cooler water with detergent and bleach
- Consider using a vacuum with a HEPA filter
- Try to reduce dampness and humidity in your home to less than 60%. This will help deter mold and dust mites, which can both be asthma triggers
- Use traps or call an exterminator for mice and cockroaches
Managing Your Asthma at Work

Managing asthma at work can be difficult, especially if you work around a lot of triggers. The kinds of triggers you are exposed to may depend on what you do. Here are some steps you can take to avoid common asthma triggers at work:

- Chemical triggers can include paints, varnishes, and glues. Try to use paints and other products that don’t contain volatile organic compounds or VOCs.
- Choose cleaning products carefully. Sometimes ordinary soap and water or vinegar is all you need.
- Cigarette smoke is a common asthma trigger. Talk to your employer about creating a smoke-free workplace.
- Make sure leaks and floods are dealt with appropriately to prevent mold growth.
- If you work outside, wear appropriate clothing and gear. Wearing a scarf over your mouth can help if cold air is a trigger.
- Consider learning relaxation or breathing techniques to reduce work-related anxiety and stress.

Don’t just rely on reducing triggers, though. Make sure you follow your treatment plan and take your medications as prescribed.

Does it feel like allergy season has gotten longer?

Warmer temperatures have extended the allergy season in several cities in Canada and the northern United States.
Managing Asthma at School

Schools can be a hotbed for asthma triggers—mold, dust mites and pests, allergens, and even exercise. But the good news is that many schools have taken steps to become more asthma-friendly.

The key to managing asthma at school is communication. Work with the school to reduce exposure to triggers (dust, mold, chemicals, smoke, etc) and improve air quality. Your school can get tips on how to do so from the Asthma-Friendly Schools Initiative.

Remember, your child or teenager is probably not the only one at school with asthma. Try working together with other parents to make your children’s schools more asthma friendly.

If your child is a student athlete, check out the section on managing asthma while exercising.

Other ways to help manage asthma at school include:

- Provide the school with a copy of your child’s asthma action plan. Make sure his or her teachers, coaches, and the school nurse know that your child has asthma

- Know your school’s policies about medication. Some schools will allow your child to carry a rescue inhaler. Others require that inhalers be kept in the school nurse’s office

- Teach your child ways to manage anxiety and stress, such as relaxation and breathing techniques

- Let gym teachers and coaches know about your child’s asthma in advance. They can help determine which activities and team sports are appropriate for your child and keep your child from overexerting him- or herself, if needed
Managing Your Asthma While Exercising

Exercise is a trigger for 90% of people with asthma. Your doctor may refer to this as exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (pronounced bron-co-con-strik-shun), or EIB.

When you exercise, your lungs lose heat and water. This can cause breathing difficulties and lead to asthma attacks. Some people who don’t have asthma still get EIB.

Sports or activities that require constant activity or are done in cold weather are more likely to trigger EIB symptoms. Examples of activities that are likely to trigger EIB symptoms include soccer, basketball, long-distance running, ice hockey, ice skating, and cross-country skiing.

If exercise is one of your asthma triggers, try these tips:

- Warm up for about 15 minutes
- Cover your mouth and nose with a scarf when you exercise in cold weather
- Try to breathe through your nose while you exercise. This helps warm the air that goes into your lungs
- Consider activities that are less likely to trigger asthma or EIB symptoms, such as walking, hiking, recreational biking, swimming, and sports that require only short bursts of activity
- Ask your doctor about short-acting and long-term maintenance medications that can be used to prevent and treat EIB symptoms. Keep in mind, however, that you may not be allowed to use some medications if you compete
Managing Your Asthma While Traveling

The idea of having an asthma attack when you’re away from home can be scary. But asthma doesn’t have to keep you from going places, if you take a little time to plan ahead.

- Start by making sure you fill your prescriptions well in advance. Be sure you have enough to get through your trip. If you’re going on a particularly long trip, you may want to see if you can refill your prescriptions at a local pharmacy.

- Organize any paperwork you need. This can include your asthma action plan, insurance cards, and a list of your medications.

- Be sure your rescue inhaler isn’t empty and hasn’t expired.

- If you’re flying, keep your medication, including your inhalers, in your carry-on bags.

- If you’re driving during pollen season, keep the windows closed and run the air conditioner.

Air pollutants from automobiles and public transportation don’t just trigger asthma attacks. They can also cause asthma to occur earlier in children.
Asthma is a chronic condition that can vary over time. That can make it difficult—but not impossible—to manage. The tips provided in this booklet can help you get a better handle on asthma. Remember that just because you’re feeling better doesn’t mean you don’t have asthma.

That’s why it will always be important to work with your doctor to monitor your symptoms and treatment.

**Additional Resources**

The organizations below can help you learn more about managing your asthma, preventing asthma symptoms, and tracking your progress.

- **The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**
  The NHLBI is part of the government that provides information about many health conditions, including asthma.

- **The American Lung Association**
  The ALA is an advocacy group for lung health and diseases, including asthma.

- **The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America**
  AAFA is a non-profit patient organization for people with asthma and allergies.