

Asthma

Are You in Control?



Blue Cross and Blue Shield
of New Mexico

How to Take Care of Your Asthma

Of the over 14 million people in the United States with asthma, almost 5 million are children.

Asthma is a lung disease that causes a narrowing of the airways (the little tubes that deliver air to your lungs). This causes shortness of breath, wheezing, and coughing.

With your doctor's help, you can control your asthma and become free of symptoms most of the time. But asthma does not go away when your symptoms go away. You need to keep taking care of your asthma, even when your breathing feels normal.

- Do not smoke. Nothing will make your lungs worse than smoking.
- Work with your doctor by keeping him or her informed of your progress and symptoms.
- Know when your asthma requires you to see your doctor urgently.
- Learn the right way to use inhaled medications and take your asthma medicines exactly as your doctor tells you.
- Listen to your "body signals" that tell you if your asthma is getting worse and act quickly with your personal asthma plan.

- If you use a peak flow meter, be sure to know how to use it correctly.
- Learn what triggers make your asthma worse and avoid or limit contact with them.
- With your doctor's permission, develop an exercise and weight-control program to improve the strength of your heart and lungs.

Keep Your Asthma In Control

- Agree on clear treatment goals with your doctor. Understand what steps you need to take and follow your doctor's advice.
- If you have asthma symptoms more than twice a week or have symptoms at night more than twice a month, ask your doctor if you would benefit from taking a daily controller medication.
- If your asthma bothers you more than twice a week, ask your doctor if you would benefit from using a peak flow meter. A peak flow meter is a simple device that you breathe into. It will help you check how well your asthma is controlled. Peak flow meters are most helpful for people with moderate or severe asthma.

Asthma Quiz

1. Asthma is a lung condition that is caused by the swelling of the lining of the airways in your lungs.
 True False Unsure
2. Even if you are taking the right asthma medicines, you should expect to feel short of breath, cough, or have wheezes at least twice a week.
 True False Unsure
3. You will know your asthma is adequately controlled if you feel able to do all normal activities, including exercise and sports.
 True False Unsure
4. You should talk to your doctor about the level of your asthma control if you use your rescue medication (such as albuterol, Ventolin, or Proventil inhalers) more often than twice a week.
 True False Unsure
5. Most of the damage asthma does to your lungs happens when you aren't having any symptoms.
 True False Unsure

Answers to the Quiz

1. **True.** If you have asthma, the airways in your lungs may be somewhat swollen and irritated all the time – even when you do not have any symptoms. When your airways are exposed to irritants or allergens, they become swollen and produce excess mucus ("phlegm"). The tiny muscles in the walls of the airways contract, making the airways smaller. Since it is harder for air to move in and out, it feels harder to breathe, and you may cough or wheeze. Wheezing and coughing are **symptoms** of these narrowed airways, not the cause.
2. **False.** Almost all people with asthma can be symptom-free if they and their doctors work together to find the right combination of controller and rescue medications.

3. **True.** Many people with asthma think they need to live with a certain amount of wheezing or shortness of breath. This is not true. With the right therapy, most people can be free of symptoms and engage in exercise.
4. **True.** Any of these symptoms may signal the need for your physician to re-evaluate what medications are right for you.
5. **True.** Doctors now know asthma is a disease that can damage lungs over time. Much of this damage may occur when you aren't having symptoms. So, if you have been prescribed a controller medication (such as an inhaled steroid), it is important to take your medication even when your asthma is not bothering you.

Your Score: _____

