



How to Cope with Asthma

Asthma in America

- Twenty million Americans have asthma.
- According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, asthma has increased an amazing 75 percent between 1980 and 1994!
- More than 5,000 people in the United States die from asthma each year.
- Asthma strikes children as well as adults.

Could you have asthma ... and not know it?

Most people know they have asthma because they have episodes of difficulty with their breathing, and wheezing. But sometimes, asthma can show itself as simply a dry cough that doesn't go away. And some people will have asthma and not notice symptoms, even though their lungs are not normal.

What IS asthma?

With asthma, the lining of the tubes that bring air to the lungs become constricted, inflamed, and filled with mucus. Left untreated, asthma can lead to long-term damage to the lungs and can be fatal.

What are the warning signs?

Symptoms of asthma include:

- shortness of breath
- wheezing
- tightness in the chest
- persistent coughing

What makes asthma worse?

Asthma is often brought on by “triggers.” Common asthma triggers include:

- exercise
- allergies – especially to pets, pollen, and food
- cigarette smoke
- perfume
- cold air
- pollution or particles in the air, such as paints, cleaners, or dust

- some medications, such as aspirin or ibuprofen
- sulfites (a preservative found in processed foods and wine)
- viral infections, such as a cold or the flu

Why should I care about asthma?

Asthma can strike anyone. It can be devastating to children who may miss a lot of school while suffering from an asthma attack. Untreated, asthma can be fatal.

How is asthma treated?

It is vital to follow the “Six Smart Steps” in the next column. Also, other medications exist and may be used when asthma is related to allergies, exposures, or exercise.

The Good News

Asthma is controllable if treated properly and regularly. Most asthma medications are easy to take, have only minor side-effects, and are effective. With proper and regular treatment, most people with asthma can lead normal, healthy lives.

For more information, speak to your physician or contact the American Lung

Association at www.lungusa.org or 1-800-586-4872. Or visit us at: www.bcbsnm.com for more information.



Six Smart Steps for people with asthma

- 1. Know your triggers.** It is important to learn what triggers bring on an asthma attack. Once you know your triggers, you can take steps to reduce or eliminate them from your daily life.
- 2. Know how to use inhalers properly.** There are many different kinds of inhalers. Be sure you know how to use yours correctly.
- 3. Know your rescue medications.** Make sure you know how and when to use a fast-acting “rescue” inhaler, such as albuterol.
- 4. Know your controller medications.** Make sure you know how and when to use a “controller” medication, such as an inhaled steroid or a long-acting bronchodilator. Take controller medications even when your breathing is normal. Remember that **controller medications DO NOT treat an acute attack!**
- 5. Know what to do during an asthma attack.** Keep calm. Breathe slowly. Sit up. Use your rescue inhalers as directed. Know how to get emergency help if you need it.
- 6. Keep a written Asthma Action Plan.** Learn from your doctor how to monitor your asthma. Many physicians recommend using a simple device called a Peak Flow Meter to measure your breathing at home. Learn how to recognize when your breathing is impaired and how to treat yourself to prevent your breathing from getting worse.

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