Keys to Breathing Easy

Ways to Manage Your Asthma

EHAP  Environmental Health Action Project
INTRODUCTION

Keys to Managing Your Asthma:

Know your asthma

Know your medications

Know your triggers

Communicate
You can manage asthma.

Asthma should *not* stop you from doing the things you want to do.
You need a plan.

Asthma affects each family in different ways. Each family needs their own, *special plan to manage* asthma.
How do you want to manage asthma?

Families need to make decisions about which actions are part of their special asthma plan.
You are not alone!

Asthma affects individuals, families, neighborhoods, and cities.

Over 25 million adults and children in the United States have asthma.

The number of people with asthma is increasing in the U.S. and around the world.
Everyone is affected by their environment.

Your environment is the indoor and outdoor spaces and places where you spend time. The environment affects everyone in good and bad ways. This is especially true for people with asthma.
LESSON ONE:

Know your asthma
Lungs and airways:

When you breathe, air goes into your mouth and nose, down your windpipe, and into the small airways of your lungs.
Asthma affects airways by causing:

1) inflammation and mucus
2) constriction
Asthma airways are “twitchy.”

The airways of people with asthma are more sensitive to the things around them than are the airways of people who do not have asthma.
Everyone’s asthma is different.

Doctors describe asthma as stairs with 6 levels. People with level 6 asthma have symptoms regularly.

Learn your asthma level.
Work with your doctor to decrease your level.
It is also important to know how well controlled your asthma is.
You can talk to your doctor about this at your child’s next visit.
What are your asthma symptoms?

1) you are reacting to something in your environment
2) how badly inflamed and constricted your airways are
Pay attention to the road ahead.

Listen to your body. Act when you first notice symptoms or your asthma may get worse.

In most cases, asthma attacks do not happen by surprise.
What should you do?

What do you do when you feel the first symptoms of asthma?
1) Take your quick-relief medication.
   2) Tell someone that you are having trouble with asthma.
   3) Always use your spacer
Take action.

Stay calm and closely watch your symptoms.
Seek medical help at once if you do not get better or your asthma gets worse.
Ask your doctor how to contact her when her office is closed.
LESSON TWO:

*Know your medications*
There are 2 types of asthma medications:

1) Controller medications relieve airway inflammation.
2) Quick-relief medications relieve airway constriction.
What questions do you have about your medications?

There are many medications to help people with asthma. They may look alike but need to be used in different ways. This can be confusing.
People try to manage asthma in many different ways. Some people take medications. Some people use family remedies. Some people use both.

What do you do?
LESSON THREE:

*Know your triggers*
The fire of asthma:

Avoid triggers and take medications to keep your “fire” under control.

Always take your daily control medication.
Asthma triggers:

Triggers are things that make asthma worse by causing:

1) airway inflammation and mucus
2) airway constriction

Each person has different asthma triggers.
You need a plan.

Each person needs their own special plan to control triggers. There are 5 steps to completing your trigger control plan:

1) Learn about asthma and your asthma triggers.
2) Know your asthma triggers.
3) Know where you are exposed to triggers.
4) Take action and control triggers.
5) Follow your asthma action plan.
What are your asthma triggers?

Step 2: Know your asthma triggers.

There are 3 ways to identify your triggers:
1) past experience
2) allergy skin testing
3) blood testing
Asthma triggers: allergens

Step 1: Learn about asthma and your asthma triggers.

- dust mites
- molds
- cats
- cockroaches
- food
- rats/mice
- dogs
- pollen

Exposure to allergens can make your asthma worse. Allergens are things in your environment that you are allergic to. Allergens can trigger an asthma attack or allergy symptoms. Each person’s allergies are different.
Asthma triggers: *irritants*

**Step 1: Learn about asthma and your asthma triggers.**

- cigarette smoke
- chemicals/sprays
- gas stove
- strong odors
- car exhaust/pollution

Exposure to irritants can make your asthma worse. Irritants are things in the air that bother everyone’s airways. The sensitive airways of people with asthma are even more affected by irritants.
Asthma triggers: *aggravators*

Step 1: Learn about asthma and your asthma triggers.

- **weather**
- **cold/flu**
- **exercise**
- **stress**

Aggravators are other things that can make your asthma worse.
What triggers can be in a bedroom?
It is important to try to control triggers in the places where you spend the most time.
Asthma triggers in the *kitchen*:

Step 3: Know where you are exposed to triggers.

What triggers can be in a kitchen? It’s important to figure out how much you are around each of your triggers.
Asthma triggers in the *bathroom*:

Step 3: Know where you are exposed to triggers.

*What triggers can be in a bathroom?*

Some triggers are caused by the age of a home or by the way the house was built.
Asthma triggers in the *living room*:

Step 3: Know where you are exposed to triggers.

**What triggers can be in a living room?**
Dust mites live in fabric items. They grow best in places that are warm and humid.
Dust mite controls:

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

- Use special mattress and pillow covers.
- Mop.
- Vacuum with a HEPA filter.
- Throw rug away.
- Freeze stuffed animals.
- Wash bed sheets weekly and wash curtains.

Take action to control dust mites. Start in places where you spend the most time and where you can make changes.
Cockroaches.

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

Cockroaches need water and food to live. They like to live in places that are warm and dark.
Cockroach controls:

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

- cover garbage
- wash dishes
- repair leaks
- use baits and traps to kill cockroaches.
  
  *(keep out of the reach of children)*

Take action to control cockroaches. Start in places where you spend the most time and where you can make changes.
Molds. 

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

Molds need water to live. Molds grow best in places that are humid, dark, and warm.

- mold in corners
- ceiling leak
- rugs
- leaking sink

LESSON THREE: Know your triggers
Mold controls:

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

- use cleaning supplies
- throw rugs away
- mop
- repair leaks

Take action. Find mold and clean places where mold grows best.
Cats and other animals.

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

Being around cats, dogs, and other animals can make your asthma worse.
Animal controls:

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

- Give pets away
- Cover garbage to keep mice away
- Keep pets out of your bedroom

Take action. Try to spend less time around animals that make your asthma worse.
Smoke.

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

Smoke irritates the airways of all people. Smoke makes asthma worse. Even if you don’t smoke, being around people who are smoking will make your asthma worse. Smoking is particularly harmful to young children.
Smoke controls:

Step 4: Take action and control triggers.

- Stop smoking
- Ask people to smoke outside

Take action. Stop smoking. Spend less time around people who smoke.
LESSON FOUR: Communicate
Who is on your asthma team?

Everyone who helps you manage asthma is part of your asthma team. Remember, you are the most important member of your team.
What does your team need to know?

Communicate with your asthma team so they can understand your plan for managing asthma.

- Your early asthma symptoms
- Signs of a severe asthma attack
- Your medications
- Your triggers
You can manage asthma.

Communicate with your asthma team so they can help you reach your goals.
What are your keys to managing asthma?

- Know your asthma
- Know your medications
- Know your triggers
- Communicate

Take action to control asthma so that it does not stop you from doing the things you want to do.