



Asthma Outlook

STAYING HEALTHY ■ LIVING WELL

FALL 2010

It's Flu Shot Season Again

Catching the flu is never fun. But when you have asthma, there's a chance that the flu could cause complications. For example, it may lead to a severe asthma attack or pneumonia.

There is a heightened risk for complications for people with asthma who get ordinary seasonal flu. Based on studies in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, the same thing seems to be true

for adults and children with asthma who catch H1N1 flu.

Reduce Your Risk

To reduce the risk for flu-related problems:

- 1. Get a flu shot.** Vaccination is the best way to guard against the flu. This year's flu shot protects against H1N1 and two strains of seasonal flu.
- 2. Reduce the spread of germs.** Wash your hands often

with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. And minimize your contact with people who are sick.

- 3. Seek medical care, if needed.** If you do catch the flu, antiviral drugs might help. But you have to act quickly—these drugs work best within two days of getting sick.
- 4. Avoid contact with others who have the flu.**



Are Asthma Medicines Safe to Use When Pregnant?

When you manage your asthma well, you can have a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby. But if not treated, asthma can cause severe vomiting or high blood pressure in pregnant women. And the baby runs the risk for premature birth, low birth weight, and even death. Like anyone with asthma, you can reduce the risk of suffering an asthma attack by avoiding asthma triggers. These might include animal dander and molds, as well as cigarette smoke.

And there's more good news! A study in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* found the most common asthma medicines don't harm a baby's growth or development. Government guidelines say that untreated asthma is a graver risk to mother and child than the medicines that can safely treat it.

While you're pregnant, it's a good idea to have your doctor check your asthma and Asthma Action Plan every month.

Good Health Guidelines

For people with asthma, it's important to make sure the following tests and vaccines are kept current:

- A spirometry test
- A flu vaccine

Be sure to talk with your health care provider about these topics:

- Writing an Asthma Action Plan
- Using a peak-flow meter
- Keeping a 30-day supply of asthma medicines on hand
- Quitting smoking

A CLOSER LOOK

Elude the Flu

For people with asthma, the flu can lead to more serious conditions, such as pneumonia and severe respiratory problems. That's why it's important to get a flu vaccine every year before the flu season hits. But according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about one-third of adults with asthma get vaccinated. Children older than 6 months with asthma should also get a flu vaccine. So should anyone in close contact with them, including their parents, nannies, and day care providers. Children up to age 9 will need two doses the first year they are vaccinated. The best time to get a flu vaccine is in September, so be sure to mark your calendar!

Although these are suggested guidelines for care, please check with your benefits plan for coverage.

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Are You Ready to Call It Quits?

When you have asthma, cigarette smoke can irritate airways that are already inflamed, causing more frequent asthma attacks. Smoking can also worsen asthma symptoms, such as coughing and wheezing. In addition, like other smokers, those with asthma are at increased risk for several diseases. These include heart disease, other lung conditions, and certain types of cancer.



Quitting for Good Is Good for You

The benefits of stopping smoking are magnified by asthma, too. A study in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* found that smokers with asthma had signs of damage to the lining of their airways. This damage may worsen asthma. But in ex-smokers with asthma who had given up smoking for at least one year, the damage wasn't seen. This may mean that damage to a smoker's airways was reversed by quitting.

Stubbing out your last cigarette is great in many ways. Within a few years, many serious health risks of smoking decrease dramatically. Other benefits occur right away. You'll have more energy. You'll look and smell better. And you'll have more money in your pocket.

The Path to Being Smoke-Free

Be ready for a challenge. The good news? Resources are available to help you quit for good.

- Talk with your doctor. Ask whether nicotine replacement or other quit-smoking medicines might be right for you. Such medicines help

ease withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms—such as trouble concentrating, restlessness, tiredness, headaches, depression, and irritability—are temporary but unpleasant.

- Call **800-QUITNOW (784-8669)**. This toll free number is public, but there may be a more specific phone number within your benefits plan. Get information from a quit-smoking counselor on the phone. The counselor can give you ideas for coping with triggers—times and places that have become linked to smoking for you. These situations may trigger the craving to light up.

How to Be Smoke-Free for Life

After you quit, you'll probably be tempted to smoke again. To get through rough patches, remind yourself of the benefits that mean most to you. Also, plan ahead for ways to manage cravings. For instance, you might munch on celery sticks, do some deep knee bends, or call a friend while you wait for the urge to pass.

Half of adult smokers have already become nonsmokers. With a little help and a lot of determination, you can do it, too.

Help Your Teen Take Charge of Asthma

Whether your teenager has had asthma for several years or he or she was recently diagnosed, you have a challenging role ahead of you—helping an adolescent cope with and manage a chronic condition.



You may need to adjust certain parenting and caregiving strategies that worked well a few years ago in order to help your older child take control of his or her asthma now.

Having asthma isn't easy, and for most kids, neither is being a teen. Here are some common teen issues and suggestions for easing your child's concerns.

Teens Don't Want to Be Different

Give your teen the facts.

Asthma is the most common serious chronic problem for kids in the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 7 million children were diagnosed with asthma in 2008.

- Ask the school nurse or your

child's doctors to help your child meet other kids with asthma. It may help your teen to know that he or she isn't the only one with the condition.

- Tell your child about celebrities, such as famous athletes, who have asthma.
- Motivate your teen to follow the Asthma Action Plan by explaining that when asthma is under control, it is less likely to interfere with what he or she wants to do. Teenagers want independence.
- Involve your child in the Asthma Action Plan. Let your teen's doctors and your teen talk about what needs to happen to get asthma under control as well as what is and

isn't working. This will show your child that you respect and trust him or her.

- Ask your child how much support he or she wants from you. Then let your doctor help decide how much freedom is appropriate and safe. You can do this in small steps. Let your teen know that freedom comes from proving that he or she can manage medicines and peak-flow monitoring and avoid triggers.

Teens Sometimes Rebel

Instead of facing any resistance from your child on your own, tap into support systems, such as other parents, the school nurse, and asthma care providers.

Use facts to build your case. Instead of scolding, help your teen learn by using health information from medical sources to show what can happen if asthma is not treated. Share printed information and website addresses. Ask providers for movies or books written for teens. This way, you are not the only voice proclaiming the importance of asthma care.

Teens May Believe That They Are Invincible

Your teen may find it difficult to believe that serious things can happen if asthma gets out of control. Talk about the realities as well as his or her fears. Be honest but provide reassurance that with good care, he or she can feel good and live an active life.

Be clear and specific about how each medicine works and how your child's body would respond if he or she stopped taking maintenance medicines. The more your teen understands about the purpose of each type of treatment, the more likely he or she will see the value of sticking with the treatment plan. Emphasize that the problems that come from ignoring the Asthma Action Plan are a bigger nuisance than sticking with the plan every day.

It's natural to want to be in charge of things that affect your child, especially his or her health. Handing over some of the asthma management to your teen probably won't be easy. But for your teen, learning how to manage his or her asthma is an important step toward being a responsible, healthy adult.

Don't Let a Little Slip Derail You

When you're making a healthy lifestyle change, such as starting to exercise regularly, adopting a new habit is only half the battle. The other half is sticking with it for the long haul. A little backsliding now and then is common. But an occasional slip doesn't have to turn into a total relapse.

What's the Difference?

A slip is a one-time mistake, but a relapse is returning to your old way of doing things. It's the difference between taking one step backward and going all the way back to square one.

Oops! You Slipped

When a stressful or demanding situation comes up, you may be tempted to fall back into an old habit. An example would be sticking to an exercise routine that's thrown off track by an illness or a vacation. You might also slip when you get around things associated with your old habits. For instance, if you always smoked with your morning coffee, that's a high-risk time for you.

Get Back on Track

Don't let a slip undermine your faith in yourself. A study in the journal *Addiction* found that relapse among ex-smokers was linked to low self-confidence about their ability to stay smoke-free. Try asking yourself what went wrong. Use that information to plan for future challenges. For example, if you broke your diet plan after a bad day at work, plan a healthy way to relieve stress in the future, such as taking a walk. The next time you run into a similar situation, you'll be better prepared to cope with it successfully.





Alcohol-based hand sanitizer. A product you rub into your hands to kill germs. It is not effective in cleaning visibly dirty hands. But it is an alternative to soap and water in certain cases, such as after sneezing into your hands or after being in contact with someone who is sick.

H1N1. Originally called “swine flu,” it is caused by a new flu virus that made its debut in 2009.

Triggers. Certain feelings, activities, or places that cause you to crave something, such as a cigarette or unhealthy foods. For example, common smoking triggers include driving, drinking coffee or beer, and being around people who are smoking.

Withdrawal. A phase almost all people go through when they are trying to quit an addiction, such as smoking or drinking. Withdrawal causes symptoms like cravings, depression, irritability, headache, and anxiety. These symptoms are uncomfortable, but they go away with time.

Mood Swings? Check Your Asthma Medicine

You're relieved that your asthma medicine helps keep asthma symptoms in check. But some medicines may make you feel nervous, irritable, or depressed. This can cause stress and make asthma worse.

The good news? Your medicine's side effects can often be managed. Start by discussing concerns about possible medicine side effects with your doctor. Don't stop taking any medicines without your doctor's OK.

Leukotriene Inhibitors

These medicines help with long-term asthma control. But some people taking them have reported mood changes, such as:

- Restlessness
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Aggressive behavior
- Depression
- Suicidal thinking and behavior

According to an article in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, suicidal behavior was rare among patients. There's no evidence that this behavior was caused by the asthma drug. Still, seek help right away if you are thinking about suicide.

Others to Watch

Several other asthma medicines may also cause unwanted changes in mood:

- **Short-acting**

beta-2 agonists. Watch for anxiety, nervousness, or restlessness.

- **Long-acting beta-2 agonists.** Watch for nervousness.
- **Methylxanthines.** These medicines help with long-term asthma management. Watch for nervousness, hyperactivity, irritability, and insomnia.
- **Oral corticosteroids.** These medicines are sometimes taken for severe allergic reactions or asthma attacks. Watch for unusual mood changes, nervousness, restlessness, and insomnia.

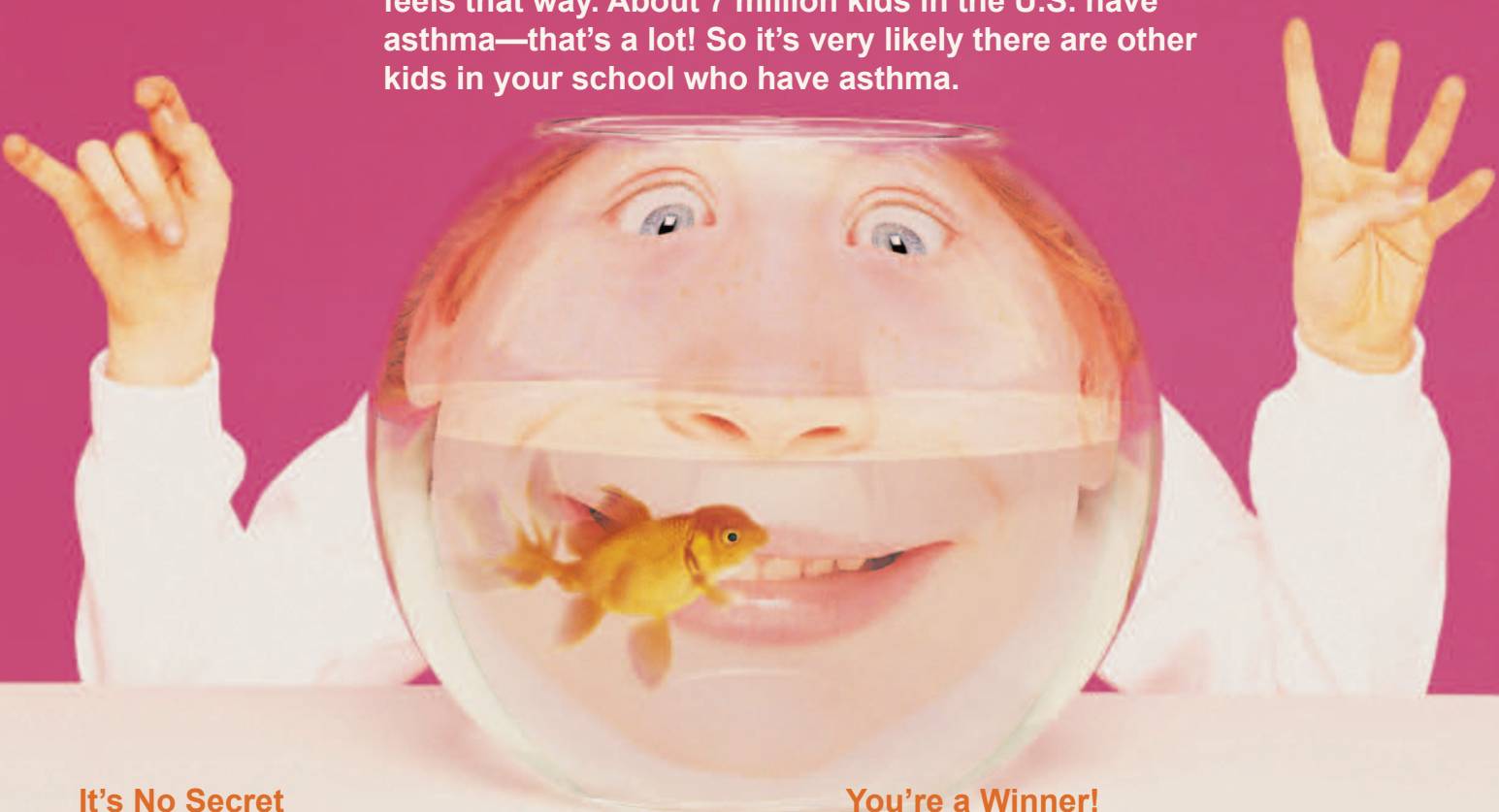
What to Do

If mood side effects occur, talk with your doctor. Many side effects are mild and soon go away. In other cases, your doctor might switch you to a different medicine. It's also important to recognize that mood changes might be caused by a number of factors in addition to asthma medicines.



You're Not the Only One

Do you ever feel as if having asthma makes you “weird”? Guess what? You’re not the only one who feels that way. About 7 million kids in the U.S. have asthma—that’s a lot! So it’s very likely there are other kids in your school who have asthma.



It's No Secret

Some kids don't want their friends to know that they have asthma. But asthma is nothing to be shy about. Here's why:

- **It's not that unusual.** Asthma is pretty common these days. More than 9 percent of kids have it. So in a school with a little more than 300 students, about 30 probably have asthma.
- **It's not your fault.** Why did you get asthma when the kid next door didn't? Your genes probably have a lot to do with it. Where you live may be a reason, too. Those things may make some kids more prone to asthma than other kids.
- **It doesn't have to hold you back.** You may worry that you'll be left out of the fun. But when your asthma is under control, you can do most of the same things as anyone else. There are many Olympic athletes, professional sports figures, and famous singers with asthma—and it doesn't stop them. If asthma gets in your way, ask your doctor how to handle it.

You're a Winner!

It takes a strong, smart person to follow an Asthma Action Plan. So pat yourself on the back. You're a whiz at taking care of your own health. You're someone other kids with asthma can look up to. Most of all, you're a kid who likes to hang out with your friends, enjoy your hobbies, and learn about things that interest you.



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