



Asthma Outlook

STAYING HEALTHY ■ LIVING WELL

FALL 2011

Keep Tabs on Your Symptoms

Wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath cause a reduced quality of life, both physically and emotionally. So keeping your asthma symptoms in check is crucial for your total well-being.

Recognize the Signs

Ask yourself these questions to see if your asthma is out of control:

- Do I have symptoms more than two days a week?
- Do symptoms wake me up more than one or two nights a month?
- Do I need to use my quick-relief inhaler more than two days a week?
- Does asthma keep me from doing some of my activities?
- Does my peak flow—a measure of how well my lungs are working—ever drop below 80 percent of my personal best number?

Take Charge of Your Life

Track your answers to the questions on the left in a daily journal. Also write down how you're feeling that day and your peak flow meter readings. Share the journal with your doctor. Take it with you every time you go for a doctor visit. Your doctor will then have the information necessary to adjust your Asthma Action Plan, if needed.



Should I Be Concerned About Natural Herbal Products?

The FDA does not test or approve herbal products. So, little is known about their safety. Many herbal products have been found to cause dangerous side effects in people with certain health problems. Also, some herbal products become risky when taken with other medicines. Here are a few examples:

- **Echinacea** can cause asthma attacks in some people with asthma.
- **Feverfew, garlic, ginkgo, ginger, and ginseng** can be unsafe when taken with blood thinners.
- **Chamomile** can cause allergic reactions in people with ragweed allergies.
- **Kelp** taken with thyroid medication may cause an overactive thyroid.

So be sure to ask your doctor before taking any herbal remedies. You need to find out if they can make your asthma worse, or if they could interfere with medicines that help manage your asthma.

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
- A pneumonia 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

How to Quit Smoking

Quitting smoking—also called smoking cessation— isn't easy. But it's worth the effort. It will help you breathe easier with asthma and decrease your risk for cancer, heart disease, stroke, and early death. Research has shown that the process of quitting successfully can be boiled down to five basic steps:

- **Get ready.** Pick a quit date in the next month and toss out all cigarettes and ashtrays. Think about what worked in the past—and what didn't.
- **Seek support.** Tell family, friends, and coworkers that you plan to quit. Consider getting in-person, online, or telephone counseling.
- **Learn new habits.** Find ways to distract yourself from smoking. Also, find alternate ways of handling stress.
- **Use medicines correctly.** Ask your health care provider about prescription and over-the-counter medicines to help you quit smoking. Follow the directions for taking it.
- **Be prepared for slip-ups.** Try not to be discouraged if you backslide. If you slip up, learn from your mistakes and get back on track.

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

The information presented in this publication is not intended to be a substitute for medical care or advice provided by a physician. Always consult your physician for appropriate examinations, treatment and care recommendations. If you have any questions about this information, you should call your physician. Specific treatments and therapies may not be covered by your health plan. For questions about your benefits, please consult your health plan. Any reference in this material to other organizations or companies, including their Internet sites, is not an endorsement or warranty of the services, information or products provided by those organizations or companies. All models are used for illustrative purposes only.

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Taking an Oral Steroid? Be Sure to Eat Well

Oral corticosteroids—steroids, for short—are sometimes prescribed for severe asthma attacks or allergy flare-ups. These powerful drugs can be very helpful. But if you use them for a long time, they also can cause side effects, like osteoporosis, cataracts, and weight gain. So it's even more important to eat wisely when you're on oral steroids.

Bone-Boosting Foods

In a study in *Osteoporosis International*, men ages 65 and older with asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) were at increased risk for osteoporosis. Some women were also at risk. Osteoporosis causes weak bones that break more easily. This higher risk was linked to taking oral steroid medicine.

Calcium helps keep bones stronger. To up your calcium intake, try adding:

- Low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese
- Dark green leafy vegetables, like kale, broccoli, and Chinese cabbage
- Canned sardines and salmon
- Calcium-fortified foods, including fruit juices, cereals, soy milk, and tofu
- Walking and other weight-bearing exercise improves bone strength

Sight-Saving Foods

Lutein and zeaxanthin are food compounds that help fight cell damage in the eyes. Some research indicates that a high intake of these compounds may lower the risk for cataracts. Sources include:

- Dark green leafy vegetables, like kale, spinach, and turnip greens
- Corn
- Green peas
- Green beans



Weight-Watching Foods

The foods listed to the left all deserve a place on your plate. But they should be just part of an overall balanced diet. This type of diet emphasizes fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and other dairy products. It also includes lean meat, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts. At the same time, it's low in saturated and trans fats, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars. Eat smaller portions more frequently and add protein, such as chicken or fish, to keep you from getting hungry.

Eating this way promotes general health. It also helps keep you from gaining weight while on oral steroids. You don't need to feel as if you're depriving yourself. Avoid focusing on what you're giving up. Instead, think about all you're gaining: a bowl of calcium-fortified cereal, a crunchy ear of corn, a filet of salmon—and the knowledge that you're taking good care of yourself.

➤ Create a personalized daily food plan at www.choosemyplate.gov/myplate.index.aspx.



6 Steps to Better Asthma Control

Taking a few puffs on your inhaler now and then isn't all there is to managing asthma. The National Asthma Control Initiative (NACI) has identified six key steps to good asthma control. By following these steps, you can feel better and breathe easier.

1 Know your starting place.

Once your asthma is diagnosed, your doctor will grade how severe it is. This grading process helps your doctor choose the medicines that are right for you. There are four levels of asthma severity: intermittent, mild, moderate, and severe.

2 Use medicine as prescribed.

Almost everyone with asthma needs an inhaler with a quick-relief medicine. In addition, many with asthma need a long-acting control medicine, which is taken every day to keep symptoms from starting. Ask your doctor how to use your medicines correctly.

3 Identify and avoid triggers.

Many things can set off asthma. Some are allergens—substances that can cause an allergic reaction in sensitive individuals. These include dust mites, pollen, mold, cockroaches, and fur. Some are irritants—inhaled substances that the airways react to by narrowing. These include cigarette smoke, perfume, cleaning products, and gasoline fumes. Asthma in people living in some areas of the country is triggered by vog—or volcanic smog—which is the air pollution created by volcanoes erupting. Other common triggers include exercise, cold weather, and infections, such as the flu. Tell your doctor about anything that makes your asthma worse. Once you know your triggers, you can learn to avoid or manage many of them.

4 Monitor symptoms and peak flow.

It's important to keep close tabs on how well your asthma

is controlled. One way to do this is by recording your daily symptoms and medicine use in an asthma journal. Also, your doctor might ask you to use a peak flow meter, a hand-held device that shows how well your lungs are working. Check your peak flow as often as recommended to catch any decline in asthma control early, before other symptoms appear. Keep track of your peak flow readings by writing them in your asthma journal. Review your journal with your doctor, especially when your asthma is being triggered often.

5 Follow an Asthma Action Plan.

To manage your asthma well, you need to know how to take your medicines, avoid your triggers, and monitor your asthma control. You also need to know exactly what to do if your asthma starts getting worse, and those close to you need details about when and how to respond in an emergency. A written Asthma Action Plan

Quiz

Step Up to
the Sink to
Stop Germs

spells out this vital information. If you don't already have an action plan, ask your doctor for one. Once you have the action plan, tell those close to you about it, where it is kept, and where medicines you might need are stored.

6 Get regular asthma checkups.

Don't wait until you are sick to see your doctor. Asthma can change over time. At regular checkups, your doctor can check your asthma and, if needed, change your treatment. When your asthma is well-controlled, you should have symptoms no more than two days a week and rarely or never be awakened by asthma. You should also be able to do all your usual activities. If your asthma isn't well-controlled, your doctor may change your Asthma Action Plan.

This multistep approach really works, as a study in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* showed. The study included adults with moderate to severe asthma who were seeing a doctor regularly. All monitored their symptoms and peak flow. Half also got extra training in how to use their medicine, avoid their triggers, and follow an Asthma Action Plan. Those in the extra training group kept asthma under better control.

➤ Learn more about the NACI at naci.nhlbi.nih.gov. Under "Audiences," select "Patients, Families & Caregivers." Read the Asthma tips there.

Washing your hands is a good way to reduce your risk of getting an infection. That's very important when you have asthma. Viral respiratory infections, such as colds and flu, may trigger asthma attacks. But how good is your hand-washing technique?

Test Your Hand-Washing Smarts

Try this true or false quiz.

1. **Nothing beats old-fashioned soap and water for getting your hands clean.** T F
2. **Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can reduce your risk for infection.** T F
3. **The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends washing your hands for at least 10 seconds at a time.** T F

Time to Come Clean!

Now check your answers and look for any areas where you need to "clean up" your act.

1. **True.** Washing your hands with soap and water is the best way to get rid of germs. Wet your hands first then use the soap. Rub your hands together to work up a lather, and scrub them well. Don't forget to wash the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
2. **True.** Washing with soap and water is the best choice. But if soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand rub that has at least 60 percent alcohol is a good substitute. One study found that office workers who used an alcohol-based hand rub were less likely to get sick than those who didn't.
3. **False.** The CDC advises washing your hands for at least 20 seconds. That's about the time it takes to hum "Happy Birthday to You" twice.

➤ For a fun hand-washing experiment to do with kids, visit www.washup.org and under "Washup Menu," select "Handwashing Experiments."



Allergen. Allergens are substances that cause allergic reactions in some people. Types of allergens include bacteria, pollen, mold, and certain foods.

Dry-powder inhaler. These inhalers don't push out the medicine. You have to inhale the powder medicine deeply from the device. This delivers the asthma medicine right to your lungs, where it is most needed.

Fortified foods. Fortified foods have added vitamins or minerals. For example, sometimes calcium is added to fruit juice and iron is added to cereals.

Irritants. People are not allergic to irritants. But they can affect sensitive airways. Irritants can cause breathing problems and asthma. They include different types of smoke and products with strong odors like gasoline.

Oral steroids. Oral steroids help to prevent or reverse airway inflammation. They help treat asthma that is out of control. Oral steroids shouldn't be taken for more than two weeks at a time to avoid complications.

Using Your Inhaler Correctly?

Inhalers can be your best friend when you have asthma. But to get medicine to your lungs, inhalers have to be used correctly.

A study in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine* looked at inhaler use by patients with asthma or COPD. Metered-dose inhalers were misused almost 90 percent of the time, and dry-powder inhalers were misused in more than 70 percent of cases. These two types of inhalers are used differently. For people who have both, it can be confusing.

Below is a quick refresher on inhaler use. If you have any questions, ask your doctor to show you the right technique and observe your technique.

Using a Metered-Dose Inhaler

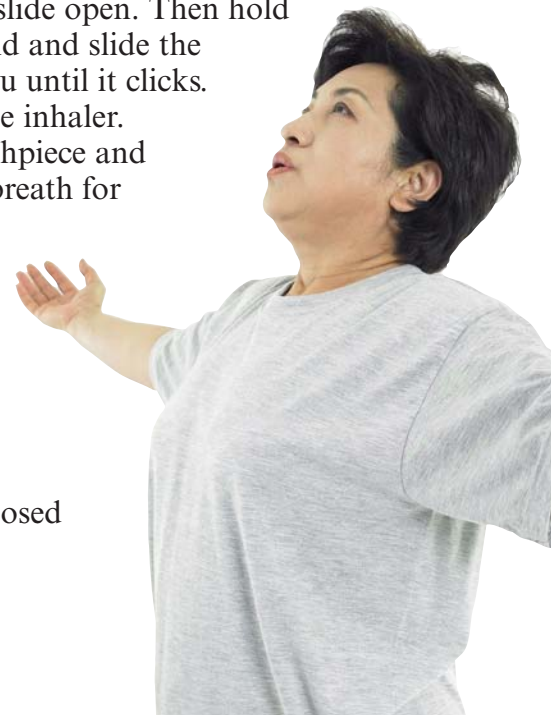
1. Remove the cap. Hold the inhaler upright and shake.
2. If the inhaler is new or hasn't been used for some time, prime (spray medicine) into the air four times.
3. Attach the spacer if you use one. Breathe out fully, away from the inhaler.
4. **With a spacer:** close your lips around the mouthpiece. **Without a spacer:** hold the inhaler mouthpiece 1 inch from your open mouth. Then, press down on the canister and breathe in slowly.
5. Hold your breath for five to 10 seconds.
6. Need a second puff? Wait 30 to 60 seconds. Then repeat.

Using a Dry-Powder Inhaler

These instructions are for a disc-shaped device called a Diskus, which holds a number of doses of dry-powder medicines. Other types of dry-powder inhalers work differently.

1. Hold the device on the palm of your left hand. Place a thumb on the thumb grip and slide open. Then hold the inhaler level with the ground and slide the lever on the edge away from you until it clicks.
2. Breathe out fully, away from the inhaler.
3. Seal your lips around the mouthpiece and breathe in quickly. Hold your breath for five to 10 seconds.
4. Place a thumb on the thumb grip and slide closed.

Rinse your mouth and spit after using any steroid inhaler. Keep the mouthpiece of the inhaler or the spacer clean. Each dry powder inhaler has enclosed directions.



Dinnertime Should Be Family Time

Did you know that having dinner with your family can help your asthma?

A team of scientists watched a lot of families eating together and then wrote about what they saw in a journal called *Child Development*. Each family had a kid with asthma. In families who talked at meals, kids usually had less severe symptoms. They were also more likely to take their asthma medicines.

So What's the Connection?

- Meals give you a chance to discuss what's going on in your life. That can mean sports, school, friends—or asthma.
- Meals give your parents a chance to pay attention to you. If you're coughing or wheezing at the table, they'll notice.

Turn Off the TV

You might be thinking that talking with Mom or Dad isn't fun. Watching TV, going online, or playing a video game sounds more exciting.

But kids who spend a lot of time doing these things often have more asthma problems. They miss out on talking with their parents. They eat more junk food. Plus, they don't get enough exercise if they're always sitting in front of a TV or computer screen.

➤ Download a calendar to help you plan fun family activities and healthy eating. Go to www.letsmove.gov, type in "let's move family calendar" in the search field.

Day of the Week	Type of Activity	What Time of the Day	Who Will Participate	Did We Do It?
MONDAY				
TUESDAY				
WEDNESDAY				
THURSDAY				
FRIDAY				
SATURDAY				
SUNDAY				

HOW MANY STARS DID YOU GIVE YOURSELF?



It's healthier to turn off the electronics at dinner. Mute your cell phone. And try not to get up and down from the table. You might be surprised by how much you like talking and hearing about everyone's day once these distractions are gone.

Make Meals Fun

Make family meals even more fun with these tips:

- **Decorate paper place mats.** Before dinner, draw a funny picture or write a silly poem on each person's place mat. Then share the laughs when they come to the table.
- **Get the conversation rolling.** Have one family member each night pick a fun question for everyone to answer. It can be serious ("Who's your hero and why?"). Or it can be lighthearted ("Which vegetable would you rather be and why?").
- **Talk about your day.** Tell your family about something that made you smile or wonder.
- **Be positive and polite.** Don't argue or criticize. That will just ruin everyone's appetite. And don't hog the conversation. Let everyone have a chance to talk.

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