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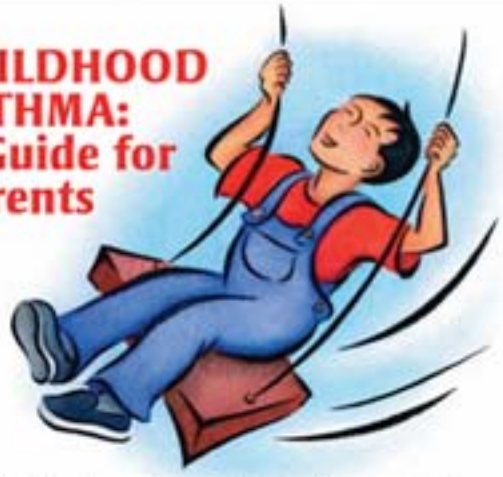
CHILDHOOD ASTHMA: A Guide for Parents



A child's asthma does not mean that he or she cannot lead a normal childhood. Here's how you can help:

Partner with a pediatrician. Talk with your child's doctor about medications, allergy testing, tracking symptoms and what activities are safe and healthy for your child to participate in.

Reduce triggers at home. Especially in your child's bedroom, remove carpeting, curtains, stuffed toys, cushions and other objects that gather dust mites. Don't allow anyone to smoke around your child.

Work with the school. Rather than having a child miss out on gym class, field trips or recess, talk with teachers and school administrators about what your child can and cannot do. Perhaps alternative activities can be devised (walking, swimming, exercising indoors on cold days) that allow your child to be a part of the class. Talk with your child's school, too, about reducing triggers such as chalk dust or animal dander in the classroom.

Find positive role models. Track star Jackie Joyner-Kersee and football great Jerome Bettis are just a couple of the famous people who have asthma. Teach your children well — asthma does not have to be a barrier to success.

Asthma and Exercise

Regular exercise is crucial for asthma sufferers. It can reduce the frequency of attacks, help manage symptoms and improve your overall health. Exercise tips:

Try exercising in a warm and humid environment, for example, taking yoga classes or swimming in a pool. Warmed air is easier on your lungs and less likely to produce asthma symptoms.

Always have your fast-acting inhaler on hand when you exercise.

Pay attention to your symptoms. If hard exercise brings on wheezing or shortness of breath, try less-vigorous exercise such as walking or slow cycling.

Warm up and cool down. Exercise at a lower intensity for 10-15 minutes at the start and end of your workout, allowing breathing and heart rate to speed up and slow down gradually.

Final thought: Breathing is an activity most people take for granted — but not if you suffer from asthma. Don't let your asthma become a source of stress and anxiety, as this will only worsen symptoms. Instead, focus on your management plan and keep a positive outlook. One day at a time, you'll soon be breathing easier.

What About Flu Shots?

A flu shot will not bring on an asthma attack or make your asthma symptoms worse. In fact, the influenza virus itself is a common asthma trigger, so getting a flu shot is your best bet for avoiding flu-induced attacks as well as serious illness. Many health centers, workplaces and hospitals offer flu shots free or at reduced cost — be sure to get yours in mid- to late fall.

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ASTHMA
Your Guide to Prevention and Control

ASTHMA: CONTROL IS THE KEY

Maybe you remember a time when people with asthma sat on the sidelines, unable to participate fully in life. Thankfully, times have changed. Millions of adults and children are affected by asthma. The encouraging news is that many lead normal, vibrant and active lives.

True, asthma is a chronic condition that can trigger breathing problems; there is no cure. If you have asthma, it is always there, even on days that you have no symptoms. Making asthma management part of your life will keep the condition from ruling your life.

5 Keys to Asthma Control

1. Work with your health care provider to come up with a management plan.
2. Take your long-term medication as prescribed, even when you feel fine.
3. Keep a close watch on your signs and symptoms.
4. Learn to avoid asthma triggers, especially colds and flu.
5. Treat asthma attack symptoms as soon as they appear.

Is It An Emergency?

Seek immediate medical care if you or your child experiences the following symptoms:

- ✓ Inability to speak without gasping for breath
- ✓ Persistence of symptoms despite use of an inhaler
- ✓ Ashen or bluish face, lips or hands
- ✓ Confusion or loss of consciousness

Asthma Control: A Step-by-Step Plan

Step 1: Try a Team Approach

If you have asthma, don't go it alone — you'll manage your condition better with support and information at hand. Your health care provider is a good place to start. He or she can help you by creating an asthma management plan, prescribing the right medications and recommending specialists who can help.

Step 2: Take Your Medication

The type of asthma medication you take depends on your individual symptoms. Some people also take more than one medication, called combination therapy. Talk with your provider about which medications are right for you.

Fast-acting inhalers. These medicines are taken at the first sign of an asthma attack. Take the prescribed number of puffs when you first begin to cough, wheeze, become short of breath or feel chest tightness.

Long-term control medicines. These medications are taken daily in either inhaled or pill form. They include corticosteroids, long-acting beta2-agonists, leukotriene modifiers and other medications that help reduce airway inflammation and control symptoms. Take these medications every day as prescribed, even if you are not experiencing symptoms.

Immunotherapy. If you have asthma that is irritated by allergies, your provider may recommend allergy desensitization shots. You'll undergo skin or blood tests to determine what you are allergic to, then you will receive a series of injections containing small doses of those substances. **The goal:** To reduce your sensitivity to allergens over time, reducing asthma symptoms.

Step 3: Track Your Symptoms

Paying close attention to how you feel each day can help you prevent asthma attacks, learn how triggers affect you and keep your asthma under control. Keeping a daily asthma journal can help. In each entry, include symptoms (perhaps rating them on a 1-10 scale), what triggers you were exposed to, dietary and medication details and any other important information.

Step 4: Control Triggers

Asthma triggers are substances that make your asthma worse. Learning what your triggers are and how to avoid them can help you control your symptoms.

Tobacco smoke. Do not allow people to smoke in your home and workplace or around you. If you smoke, talk to your provider about getting help to quit.

Dust mites. Dust mites are microscopic bugs that live in dusty areas. Encase your mattress and pillow in special dust-proof covers and wash bedding in hot water. Try to reduce the amount of cushions, drapes and carpeting in your home. Wear a filter mask while cleaning, and use a vacuum with a HEPA filter.

Animal dander. Keep furred and feathered pets out of the bedroom, off fabric furniture and out of carpeted areas.

Cold air. Don't exercise outdoors in cold weather. Cover your mouth and nose with a scarf. Try to breathe through your nose rather than your mouth so that air is warmed before it reaches your lungs.

Mold. Fix leaky pipes immediately. Clean moldy surfaces with a cleaner that contains bleach.

Sulfites. Avoid beer, wine, dried fruit and shrimp since these foods commonly contain sulfites. Also, carefully check the label of other foods for "contains sulfites" warnings.

Step 5: Treat Asthma Attacks

During an asthma attack, breathing tubes in the lungs swell and produce thick mucus. An attack may be accompanied by breathing difficulty, wheezing and coughing up mucus. It can happen suddenly or take days to develop.

What to do: Take your asthma medicine, usually a fast-acting inhaler prescribed by your health care provider. Take the prescribed number of puffs, and try to relax and breathe normally. Most moderate asthma attack symptoms calm down gradually as you use your inhaler. If the medicine does not work promptly, call your provider or go to the emergency room.