

Asthma

Asthma is a lung disease that causes swelling and narrowing of the airways. Asthma symptoms can appear when you are exposed to a trigger (such as pollen, smoke, dust mites).

Risks

Untreated or uncontrolled asthma can lead to permanent damage of the lungs and airways. It may also lead to sudden and serious trouble breathing, also known as an asthma attack, and can be severe enough to need hospitalization. Other lasting effects may include higher risk of infection, trouble getting a good night's sleep, and difficulty exercising.

Medication

General asthma treatment includes multiple medicines to help manage your asthma.

- **Rescue Inhalers** provide quick relief from symptoms by relaxing the muscles in the airways.
- **Long-term controller inhalers** help prevent and control asthma symptoms.

Using long-term controller and rescue medicines correctly is important for asthma symptom control. Talk with your pharmacist about how to use your inhalers and ways to remember to take your medicines.

- Rescue inhalers should be used on an as-needed basis.
- Long-term controller medicines should be used on a regular basis as prescribed this could be an inhaler, pill, or injection.

Your pharmacist or health care provider should educate you about the following:

- Which inhaler to use
- How to use your inhaler
- How to clean your inhaler

Ask your pharmacist if you have questions about which inhalers to use when, how to use your inhaler, or how to clean your inhaler. If you have trouble using your inhaler, ask your pharmacist or health care provider about other options that might be better for you – this may include using a spacer or switching to a different type of inhaler.

Monitoring

Regular visits with your healthcare provider also help you manage your asthma and symptoms. Your health care provider should provide you with an asthma action plan that outlines what to do and what medicines to take based on your symptoms.

Symptoms to monitor:

- Number of daytime symptoms (daily, weekly, monthly)
- Rescue inhaler use (how frequently are you using/refilling your rescue inhaler?)
- Nighttime sleep awakenings due to asthma (daily, weekly)
- Trouble performing activities due to asthma

Other things you can do

Asthma symptoms may be managed by improving indoor air quality and minimizing triggers that can worsen asthma. This may include the following:

- Allergens (e.g. dust mites, animal dander or pollen)
- Tobacco smoke (ask your pharmacist if you need help to stop smoking)
- Changes in weather
- Irritants (e.g. chemicals or air pollution)
- Certain foods (e.g. beer, wine, dried fruit, processed potatoes or shrimp)
- Medications (e.g. ibuprofen or certain beta blockers)
- Stress

Engage in regular physical activity and use appropriate medications if needed to prevent exercise-induced asthma.

Eat a healthy diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables.

Ask your pharmacist about important immunizations that are recommend for people with asthma.

Resources

1. Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) Global Strategy for Asthma Management and Prevention, 2024 update. <https://ginasthma.org/2024-report/>
2. Mayo Clinic. Asthma. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/asthma/symptoms-causes/syc-20369653>