



Managing Your Asthma

Breathing should not be tough! Asthma is a chronic, inflammatory illness of the airways that can affect the way you sleep, work and play. However, you shouldn't let fear of asthma symptoms keep you from doing the things you love. With proper management, you can control your asthma symptoms and continue living healthy.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO STAY HEALTHY?

Visit your primary doctor, allergy and/or pulmonary specialist a minimum of every six months to discuss your:

- **Asthma Action Plan**

Everyone with asthma should write down an Asthma Action Plan with their doctor. This plan will provide information and instructions on how you can manage your asthma, including what medications to take, how to recognize if your symptoms are getting worse and what to do in an emergency. Review your Asthma Action Plan with your doctor a minimum of every six months to determine what is working and what may need to be changed.

- **Medications**

Make sure you know what your medicines are, how often you should take them, how to use them properly and what results to expect. Your doctor or pharmacist can show you how to use each inhaler or "puffer" medication, to maximize their effectiveness.

- **Symptoms**

Talk about how often you have them and what triggers them. Make sure you know the early warning signs of an attack and what to do if one occurs.

- **Lung Function**

Ask if you should get a simple, painless test (called spirometry) to find out how your lungs are working. There are three changes to your lungs when you have asthma:

- Swelling inside your airways.
- Excess mucus that clogs airways.
- Muscles tighten and squeeze around your airways.

These changes restrict airflow to your lungs and make it harder to breathe. Reliever medicines like albuterol relax the muscles around your airways. Only controller medicines prevent all three changes!

HOW DO I KNOW IF MY ASTHMA IS OUT OF CONTROL?

Ask yourself three questions:

1. Do you take your quick-relief inhaler more than two times per week?
2. Do you wake up at night with asthma symptoms more than two times per month?
3. Do you refill your quick-relief inhaler more than two times per year?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then your asthma may not be well controlled. Discuss your symptoms with your doctor to determine if your treatment plan is working or if it might be time for a change.

MEDICATIONS USED TO TREAT ASTHMA

Although asthma can not usually be cured, there are two kinds of medications used to control asthma:

- **Controller medications** — Taken every day to keep symptoms and attacks from starting. Even when you don't have symptoms, you still need to take your controller medications.
- **Reliever or quick-relief medications** — Used to quickly treat an attack or relieve symptoms. However, the goal is not to need a reliever medicine. Overuse of a reliever medicine — such as albuterol — can be dangerous and cause harmful side effects, which is why it is very important to use controller medications regularly.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Asthma Supplies

Ask your doctor if you might benefit from using a spacer or peak flow meter. A **spacer** attaches to some inhalers and holds the medicine in the chamber long enough for you to inhale. A **peak flow meter** is a simple device that can warn you of asthma problems even before you feel the symptoms. Spacers and peak flow meters are available at participating pharmacies and durable medical equipment vendors with a prescription from your doctor.

Asthma Action Plan

[Download a free copy of an Asthma Action Plan.](#) To develop your own Asthma Action Plan, bring the plan with you when you visit your doctor. The plan includes what to do every day to prevent symptoms, and also what to do if symptoms worsen. Keep a copy of the Asthma Action Plan with you at all times. If your child suffers from asthma, be sure to give a copy to teachers and babysitters. Be sure to review this plan with your doctor a minimum of every six months.

LEARN MORE

Independent Health's Healthwise® Tool

Healthwise is an online health management tool that offers a variety of ways to help you take charge of your personal fitness and lifestyle goals. Healthwise provides health information, programs and tools that address each of your special health needs. Visit Healthwise at **[independenthealth.com](https://www.independenthealth.com)** under "Tools, Forms & More."

New York State Smokers' Quitline

Independent Health knows that quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health, but we also realize that it is one of the most difficult habits to break. The best place to start is the New York State Smokers' Quitline. Call toll free at **1-866-NYQUITS** (1-866-697-8487) or visit the website at **[nysmokefree.com](https://www.nysmokefree.com)**.

American Lung Association

Visit **[lung.org](https://www.lung.org)** to learn more about managing lung disease.

TOOLS & RESOURCES

From health tips and guidelines that help you stay informed, to useful online and mobile tools that help make it easier to manage your health, Independent Health has the tools and resources you need to lead a healthier life.

To learn more, visit the "My Health" section at [independenthealth.com](https://www.independenthealth.com).

