



SPRING 2021

ASTHMA

Information to help you improve your health from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

Asthma is a chronic lung condition involving inflamed or narrowing airways which can make it very hard to breathe. During an asthma attack, you may feel like your chest is constricting and experience severe coughing and/or wheezing. Asthma attack triggers may include changes in air temperature, allergens, upper respiratory infections, various irritants in the environment and exercise.

Similar, but not the same ASTHMA & COPD

Asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) have a lot in common. Both may cause coughing fits or wheezing, or make you unable to catch your breath. Both diseases may cause inflamed airways and your symptoms may worsen over time. It's no wonder the two are often confused.

Asthma can happen at any age. Usually the diagnosis comes during childhood.

COPD tends to develop over time. Most often, people receiving a COPD diagnosis are over 45.

COPD can typically be traced to certain lifestyle choices, such as smoking cigarettes. In fact, 9 out of 10 deaths from COPD can be attributed directly to smoking.

Asthma, on the other hand, tends to come out of nowhere. Most think the condition is caused by genetics or the environment.

But just because the conditions are different does not mean they are not related. Many people with COPD also have asthma. The risk for developing either condition increases as you get older. In addition, the goal of treatment for either condition is the same.

Whether you have COPD, asthma, or both, your goal should be to live a healthy, active lifestyle, take your medicines as prescribed, and avoid known environmental triggers to reduce your symptoms, prevent attacks, and breathe easier.

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Ten tips to reduce SPRINGTIME ASTHMA ATTACKS

Spring blossoms also bring pollen, a common asthma trigger.



Roughly two-thirds of people with asthma also have seasonal allergies which can increase inflammation in your airways and cause a worsening of your symptoms. Here are ten tips for how to handle springtime triggers:

- 1 Take your medicines as prescribed.** If you have an emergency inhaler, keep it with you.
- 2 You may want to discuss allergy shots** with your healthcare provider if your allergies are severe.
- 3 Take off your shoes** when you come home so you don't carry pollen inside.
- 4** If you've been outside for a period of time, **take a shower** when you get home to wash off outside allergens.
- 5 Keep windows closed,** and use air conditioning in your car and home.
- 6 Check the air quality** before going outside. Many weather apps and websites provide air quality forecasts and alerts.
- 7 Change out air filters** as recommended for your home and your car.
- 8 Launder sheets and pillowcases** frequently with hot water and soap.
- 9 Vacuum carpets and furniture** once a week to get rid of dust.
- 10 If you smoke, quit.** Try to avoid being around other people who smoke.

Most importantly, if you notice a worsening of symptoms, make an appointment to talk to your doctor. Your doctor will be able to provide more personalized tips or adjust your medicine to better control your asthma and keep it from getting worse.

Have questions related to your health?

TAKE CONTROL

with our exclusive **Chronic Condition Coaching** program.

Call **1-888-841-5741** for information and to talk to a clinician.



What you need to know about ASTHMA MEDICINES

Taking medicines as prescribed by your doctor is the biggest key to controlling your asthma. Medicines can stop an asthma attack in its tracks or prevent a worsening of your asthma symptoms.

Asthma medicines come in different forms: pills, shots or infusions. Most commonly, your asthma medicine may come from an inhaler. In addition to a daily inhaler for medicine, you may be prescribed what is known as a “rescue inhaler” which you use if you are suffering an asthma attack.

Another common method for medicine delivery is with a nebulizer, a machine which turns medicine into a mist that you can breathe in through a mask.

Some medicines are prescribed as long-term treatment to prevent a worsening of symptoms. Others are prescribed for the short term to help you get your asthma under control.

A nebulizer is a machine that turns medicine into a mist you can breathe.



LONG-TERM MEDICATIONS

Corticosteroids: These are commonly prescribed to reduce inflammation and mucus in your airways and are not to be confused with the anabolic steroids often abused by athletes. This medicine is most often given through an inhaler to target your lungs and airway directly but may also sometimes be prescribed in pill form.

Combination inhalers; These contain both a corticosteroid and a long-acting beta agonist, which is a medicine that helps relax airways.

Biologics: These are a newer class of medicine which target cells and proteins to prevent inflammation. These are rarely prescribed because they are expensive and sometimes only benefit those whose asthma cannot be controlled through other means.

Cromolyn sodium: This kind of inhaler prevents your airways from swelling due to asthma triggers.

Leukotriene modifiers: This reduces swelling in your airways and is taken as a pill or in a liquid form.

Theophylline: This medicine is taken orally as a pill or liquid. It can make it easier to breathe by relaxing the muscles controlling your airway.

SHORT-TERM MEDICATIONS

Short-acting beta agonists: These relax the smooth muscles around your airway quickly. This is usually the first choice among doctors for a rescue inhaler.

Long-acting muscarinic antagonists (LAMA), also known as anticholinergics: This inhaled medicine does not work as quickly as a short-acting beta agonist but serves the same purpose to relax airways. It can also be used to reduce mucus production.

Combination quick-relief medicines: Inhaler with both an anticholinergic and short-acting beta agonist. It can also be prescribed for use with a nebulizer to help control asthma symptoms after an attack.

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TALK to a NURSE

Eligible members have access to our free nurse phone lines.

Call **1-888-841-5741** for more information.

COVID-19 UPDATE

The arrival of the first COVID-19 vaccines is a major development in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

The current vaccines are approximately **95% effective in preventing COVID-19**, and provide a high level of protection against contracting the virus.

Getting vaccinated will help keep you and your family healthy and safe.

MASK UP. STAY SAFE.

For more information about the COVID-19 vaccine and its availability in your area, contact your physician's office or local pharmacy. Additional COVID-19 topics and how the pandemic could affect you and your family can be found at **www.cdc.gov/COVID19**

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