



FALL 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.

## Tips for Controlling Your ASTHMA

Asthma that is not well controlled can cause many problems. People miss work or school, go to the hospital, or even die because of their asthma. Controlling asthma according to your treatment plan may help prevent the problems that asthma can cause.

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute offers the following tips to help keep your asthma under control:



### GET PROPER CARE

You can prevent serious problems related to asthma by getting proper care. With the help of your doctor, you can have control over your asthma and become symptom-free most of the time. But remember your asthma does not go away when your symptoms go away. You must take care of your asthma, even if you have a mild case.

### ASSESS YOUR SYMPTOMS

You may have all of these asthma symptoms, some of them, or just one. Symptoms can be mild or severe and may include:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath

Signs that your asthma is not well controlled can include any of the following:

- You have symptoms more than 2 days a week
- You need to use your rapid-acting medication to relieve your symptoms more than 2 days in a week
- Your medications don't work as well as they used to work
- Your symptoms interfere with sleep
- Your symptoms interfere with your normal activity
- Your peak flow is below 80% of your personal best
- You have to seek medical help right away due to an asthma attack



## WORK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

Consider the following tips for working with your doctor on an asthma control plan:

- Agree on clear treatment goals.
- Ask questions and bring up any concerns.
- Tell your doctor if you think you'll have trouble doing what is asked.
- Bring your medications and written action plan to each visit.
- Before leaving your doctor's office, write down the things you are supposed to do.
- See your doctor at least every 6 months.
- Consider using an online program to manage symptoms.
- Stay in contact with your doctor between visits, especially if your symptoms are changing. Good communication can help you stay out of the hospital and have better control of your asthma.

## TAKE THE RIGHT MEDICATIONS AT THE RIGHT TIME

There are 2 main kinds of asthma medications: long-term control medications and short-term (quick-relief or rescue) medications.

**Long-term control medications** prevent symptoms and control asthma. It often takes a few weeks before you feel the full effects of this medication. Ask your doctor about taking daily long-term control medications if you:

- Have asthma symptoms 3 or more times a week
- Have asthma symptoms at night more than twice in a month
- Have trouble doing all your normal activities
- Have a peak flow less than 80% of your personal best

If you need long-term control medication, you will need to take it each day. Post reminders to yourself to take your medication on time.

For almost everyone with persistent asthma, a long-term control regimen should include a form of inhaled steroid. Ask your doctor if you are not sure whether a steroid is part of your treatment.

If you are still having symptoms with a steroid inhaler, other types of long-term control medications can be added.

**Inhaled quick-relief medication** quickly relaxes and opens your airways and relieves asthma symptoms. But it only helps for about 4 hours. Take quick-relief medication when you first have symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, and chest tightness. This can keep you from having a more severe asthma attack. Do not delay!

Tell your doctor if you notice that you're using more of this medication than usual. This is often a sign that your long-term control medications needs to be increased, changed, or added to.



**Have questions related to your health?**

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Email **mybluehealth@bcbsal.org**.

Download the free **Wellframe** mobile app. Enter access code **alwell**.

# The Connection Between ALLERGIES & ASTHMA

Because asthma and allergies are so common and frequently occur together, most parents may want to know about preventing or avoiding these conditions.



**ASTHMA** A condition in which the lungs react to some kind of irritation with mucous production and airway narrowing from muscle contraction and inflammation along the breathing pathway. This reaction may occur moments after exposure to an irritant or after several hours have passed.

**ALLERGY** A common cause of asthmatic reactions, but similar symptoms can be produced by non-allergen sources, such as chemical or lung irritants or viral infections. An asthma episode usually includes difficulty breathing, wheezing coughing, or other respiratory symptoms. Asthma is usually controllable with treatment. In between “attacks,” or after treatment, the lungs usually return almost completely to normal.

**AVOID TRIGGERS** Exposure to tobacco smoke may trigger asthma in children because smoke is an irritant. Other triggers include exercise, cold air, and allergens. The allergens that most commonly cause an asthma episode are dust mites, mold, pollen, and animal dander. Food allergies can also trigger an asthma episode in some people. Foods like shellfish and peanuts can be asthma triggers.

## ALLERGY INSIGHT

“Allergen” is the word that doctors use to describe a substance in the environment to which our bodies may react with an allergic or asthmatic reaction. Common allergens include pollen, animal dander, mold, dust mites, latex, certain foods, insect bites and stings, certain plants, and medications.

Allergic symptoms most commonly include itching of the eyes, throat, or skin, sneezing, nasal congestion, coughing, wheezing, or rash.

Typically, allergic substances enter the body in one or more of the following ways:

- Absorption through the skin (latex)
- Inhalation through the mouth or nose (pollen or dust mites)
- Ingestion (foods or medications)
- Injection (insect bites and stings)

## PUTTING KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

You can do a number of things to safeguard your home and family against allergies and asthma. Following these tips may lessen the severity and frequency of episodes for people who are at high risk:

- **Control exposure to smoke**—If you must smoke, do so outside. Never smoke in a car that children ride in. Wood smoke may also be an asthma risk; avoid wood heating. Make sure that gas heaters and stoves are vented to the outside.
- **Control exposure to dust mites**—Dust mites are microscopic creatures that are found in large quantities in your home. They tend to live in bedding, but are far too small to be seen. Strategies to reduce exposure to mites include:
  - Wash all linens in hot water each week.
  - Vacuum carpeting and upholstered furniture frequently using a vacuum cleaner with a “HEPA” filter.
  - Keep indoor relative humidity below 50%.



**BlueCross BlueShield  
of Alabama**

450 Riverchase Parkway East  
P.O. Box 995  
Birmingham, Alabama 35298-0001

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to our free nurse phone lines.

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more information.

# COVID-19 UPDATE

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

The current vaccines 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](http://www.cdc.gov/COVID19)**

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