

Asthma

Improve your lung health with
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.

ASTHMA AND YOU: PREVENTION IS ALWAYS THE BEST MEDICINE. To help control your asthma symptoms, it's important to stay educated and take proactive steps. Learn how to control your asthma and avoid environmental factors that can make it worse. Get your flu shot every year and schedule other necessary immunizations as part of your annual routine wellness visit. The purpose of this newsletter is to help you control your asthma. We hope you find this information helpful. Thank you for reading.





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:



COUGH



**CHEST
TIGHTNESS**



WHEEZING



**DIFFICULTY
BREATHING**

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

- You have symptoms more than two days a week
- You need to use your rapid acting medication to relieve your symptoms more than two days 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 be sure to 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
- Consider using an online program to manage your symptoms
- Organizations like the American Lung Association and the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America offer information on asthma management and support groups
- Stay in contact with your doctor between visits, especially if your symptoms are changing





How To Keep Your Home Clean, But Not Toxic

Keeping a clean house is a necessary step in providing a safe living environment.

While household cleaners tend to be more dilute and less potent than their industrial-strength counterparts, many do contain some of the same potentially harmful ingredients.

The good news is that safer cleaning products are available, and you can also use safer cleaning techniques to protect yourself, your family, even your pets.

To start, be sure to read all labels well. Do not assume a green bottle labeled “natural” is toxin-free. Consider the following pointers to avoid purchasing toxic cleaners:

- Consider products with:
 - Citrus or plant-based oils: orange and lemon for degreasing, tea tree and eucalyptus for disinfecting and olive for polishing
- Choose products that list all of their ingredients
- Make your own cleaning products from non-toxic ingredients such as baking soda, club soda and white vinegar
- Focus on cleaning; disinfect only when necessary. Good cleaning habits will mean you won't need to disinfect nearly as often
- Do not use chemical carpet cleaners
- Use chlorine bleach sparingly. Consider using fragrance-free, non-chlorine bleaches containing hydrogen peroxide instead
- Choose unscented cleaning products
- Be wary of concentrated cleaners that advertise safety only when used under certain conditions
- Avoid cleaners carrying a "danger" or "warning" label



- Enzymes to break up drain clogs

Do not assume a green bottle labeled “natural” is toxin-free.

The Connection Between **ALLERGIES & ASTHMA**

ASTHMA AND ALLERGIES ARE COMMON AND FREQUENTLY OCCUR TOGETHER.

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|-----------------------|--|
| ASTHMA | Asthma is 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 | We are exposed to at least some allergens all the time. But, most of us can encounter these troublemakers without experiencing any symptoms at all. Allergic symptoms most commonly include itching of the eyes, throat, or skin, sneezing, nasal congestion, coughing, wheezing or rash. |
| AVOID TRIGGERS | Smoking can trigger asthma and make symptoms worse. There are tools that can help people to quit. Other sources of smoke can trigger asthma, such as wood stoves or campfires. |

ALLERGY INSIGHT

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

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 against allergies and asthma:

- Control exposure to smoke
- Control exposure to dust mites
- Wash all linens in hot water every seven days
- Vacuum carpeting and upholstered furniture frequently using a vacuum cleaner with a "HEPA" filter
- Keep indoor relative humidity below 50%
- Careful cleaning of bathrooms and repairing leaky pipes can help reduce mold from growing

Knowing the underlying types, causes, and triggers of both asthma and allergies is the foundation of putting effective prevention and treatment strategies into action.

General Guidelines for Managing Asthma

Making changes to lifestyle habits can help some people avoid asthma attacks. Here are some steps you can take:

1 Reducing Exposure to Allergens or Irritants That Trigger Asthma

Allergens may irritate asthma symptoms in some people. Reducing contact may help. Pay attention to warning signs:

- ✓ Shortness of breath and wheezing
- ✓ Chest tightness or pain
- ✓ Using bronchodilators more often
- ✓ Problems sleeping
- ✓ Frequent coughing, especially at night



2 Asking a Doctor About Physical Activity

Exercising can improve a person's health and mood. It can also reduce asthma attacks. People with asthma should:

- ✓ Have good asthma control before exercising
- ✓ Warm up for at least ten minutes before exercise
- ✓ Avoid triggers when exercising, such as high pollution levels, pollen, freshly cut grass, or cold
- ✓ Increase new activities slowly

3 Losing Weight loss may improve control in people who are overweight or obese.



4 Getting the Flu Vaccine

Asthma can lead to a higher risk of flu-related problems. Adults and children older than 6 months old should get a yearly flu shot.



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AlabamaBlue.com/TalkToANurse



COVID-19 Update

The current vaccines provide a high level of protection against severe disease.

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

STAY SAFE.

This information is provided for general informational purposes. Information contained in this communication is not intended to replace professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider regarding your healthcare needs. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay seeking medical advice because of something you have read in this informational piece. Always check your benefits for coverage information and limitations.

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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