

Indiana Chronic Disease Management Program

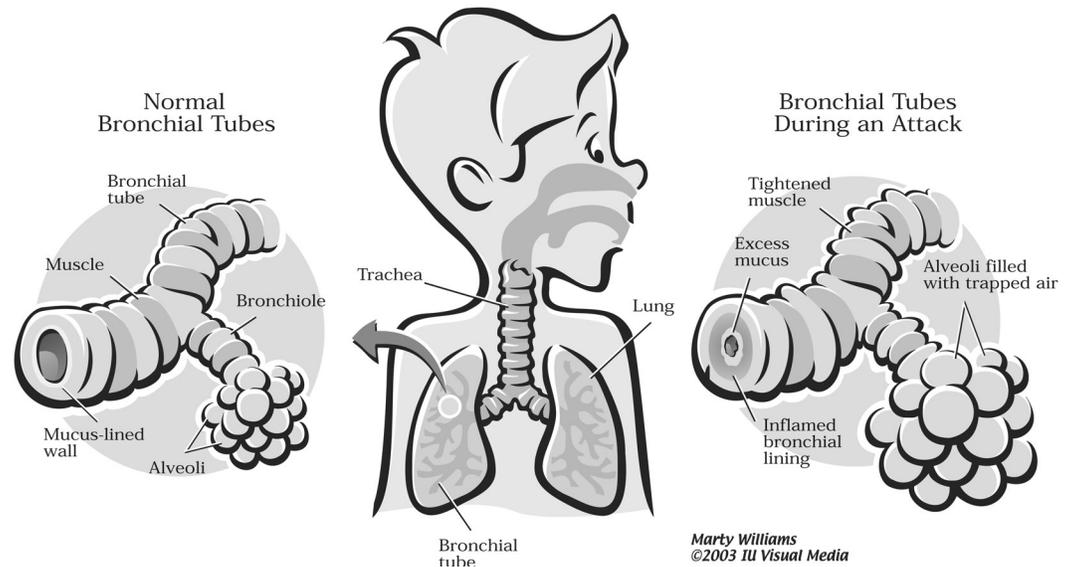
## Avoid Your Asthma Triggers

Triggers are the things that attack your airways, making it hard to breathe. Common asthma triggers include irritants like smoke or chemical fumes. Other triggers are the things you may be allergic to, like pollen, dust, or animal dander. It is important to identify your triggers so that you can avoid them.

For further information contact the Indiana Chronic Disease Management Program at [www.indianacdmpprogram.com](http://www.indianacdmpprogram.com) or call your doctor.

# Breathe Easier

## ASTHMA OVERVIEW



### What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease of the airways or breathing tubes in the lungs. These airways carry air to the lungs. Airways get smaller and smaller like branches of a tree. When asthma is under control, the airways are clear and air flows easily in and out of the lungs.

The most common signs and symptoms that a child has asthma are wheezing, a cough that seems to never go away, or tightness of the chest. Asthma may develop at any age. You cannot catch asthma from other people. But, since asthma runs in families, more than one person in the same family may have it.

Asthma may attack quickly when children are exposed to fumes from vehicles or cigarette smoke. Asthma also may attack quickly when children are exposed to things that they are allergic to or when they are sick with colds or other infections. Some attacks may happen without much warning at all. Attacks may be mild or very serious. Coughing and trouble breathing at night cause problems with sleeping. People may die from a bad asthma attack.

Your doctor can tell you how to control your asthma and how to prevent attacks.

### What causes an asthma attack?

When asthma is not under control, the sides of the airways in the lungs stay inflamed, sore, thick, and swollen. When the airways are like that, even if the breathing feels normal, it is easy for a new asthma attack to start. Then the airways get very narrow, and less air gets in and out of the lungs. The child coughs and wheezes. The chest feels tight.

Many things can start an asthma attack. These things that start an attack are called "triggers." Here are some examples of asthma triggers:

- Cigarette smoke - also cigar, or pipe smoke,
- Allergies to animals with fur (like cats or dogs),
- Cockroaches,
- Dust in carpets, beds, pillows, and stuffed toy animals,
- Strong fumes and sprays like car exhaust, strong perfumes, or stinky cleaning products,
- Pollen from trees and flowers, grass and weeds,
- Cold air in colder seasons, or sometimes warm, rainy days
- Colds, or other infections,
- Running, playing, exercising, and hard work.

## What are asthma symptoms?

- Wheezing - like a whistling sound heard when breathing out,
- Cough,
- Feeling as though it's hard to breathe,
- Feeling tight in your throat,
- Feeling out of air,
- Having a tight voice,
- Tight chest,
- Shortness of breath,
- Tired feeling or feeling like you don't have any energy,
- Hurts to breathe,
- Feeling short of breath when you exercise, or are active like when you are playing or doing sports.

## How is asthma diagnosed?

Your doctor can tell if you have asthma by talking to you and from a physical exam.

There are tests that help diagnose asthma and help keep an eye on how it is doing. These tests measure how well air is flowing in and out of your airways. These tests are called pulmonary function tests and peak flow tests.

## How is asthma treated?

Your doctor or nurse will help you understand how bad your asthma is and how to prevent asthma attacks. You should have an asthma action plan to follow when you feel good and when you have attacks.

An action plan helps you remember how to manage your asthma. It tells you what medicines to take, depending on how bad your asthma symptoms are.

### Quick Relief - relieves (stops) symptoms

- If you have symptoms less than once or twice a week, a quick relief medicine may be the only medicine you need to control your asthma.
- If exercise is one of your triggers, your doctor may prescribe a quick relief medicine before exercise.

### Long-Term Control - prevents the swelling/ inflammation

- If you have symptoms more than twice a week, your asthma may be out of control and you may need a long-term control medicine.
- This medicine must be taken EVERY DAY to be effective.

**Remember:** Your asthma action plan may not be working if you still have symptoms with exercise, at rest, at night, or early in the morning. Your doctor may need to change the dose or type of your medicine. If symptoms last more than two weeks, talk to your doctor.

## What medicines are used to treat asthma?

Your action plan will show you when to take your medicines. Usually, there are two types of medicines used for asthma:

### 1. Quick Relief

Medicines that relax the airways to make breathing easier and quicker. An example is albuterol.

### 2. Long-Term Control

Medicines that reduce the swelling or inflammation in the airways. They can also prevent the swelling from starting and help prevent attacks. These have no quick relief effect and take a longer time to work. An example is an inhaled steroid.

## How are asthma medicines prescribed?

- Each patient's asthma is different.
- Each patient's airways react to different triggers at different times, and with different symptoms.
- Asthma medicines must be given for each person's special needs.
- It may take some time to find out which medicines work best for you.



## Are asthma medicines safe?

- Asthma medicines are safe, **if** you follow your doctor's orders. Doctors closely watch how much medicine you are taking at each visit to decrease the risk of side effects.
- Some people are afraid that they will become addicted to their medicines. This is not true.
- Others worry that if medicine is taken all the time, it will no longer work. This problem rarely happens and if it does it can be managed by your doctor.

## What to do IF side effects happen?

- Report all unusual symptoms to your doctor.
- **Do not** stop the medicine completely until you talk to your doctor. This can cause your asthma to get worse.

## Tips for correct use of asthma medicine.

- Use your quick relief medicine at the first sign that your asthma is getting worse:
  - First sign of an upper respiratory infection like a cold.
  - A drop in your peak flow number (below 80% of best, or below what your doctor has written on your asthma action plan).
  - Cough
  - Tight chest
  - Wheezing
  - Short of breath.
- An asthma attack is easier to stop if you take your medicine as soon as symptoms start.
- Quick relief medicines relieve symptoms, but they cannot prevent the swelling that causes the symptoms.
- When you have to use a quick relief medicine more than 2 times per week, it may be a sign that the swelling in your airways is getting worse.
- If you use quick relief medicine to:
  - Relieve symptoms every day, or
  - Use it more than 3-4 times in a single day,
  - You may need to have your doctor look at your long-term control medicine (or start a new long-term control medicine).
- Controller medicines (anti-inflammatory medicines) must be taken **every day**, even if you are not having symptoms.
- Controller medicines (anti-inflammatory medicines) must be taken **regularly** for them to work.

## What are the goals of asthma treatment?

- Prevent hospitalization and emergency room visits.
- Prevent school absences.
- Prevent disturbed sleep.
- Allow full participation in activities such as playing, exercise, and sports.

## WARNING SIGNS OF DIFFICULT BREATHING IN AN INFANT OR CHILD

If your infant or child has any of the symptoms below, follow your emergency action plan. These are signs of severe breathing problems - *The Red Zone*.

### Infant or Child

- Skin on chest is pulling in with each breath - retractions. (You may see this between and below the ribs, at the throat or at the shoulder blades).
- Nose flares with each breath.
- Hunching his/her shoulders upward with each breath.

- Breathing is fast or shallow.
- Your child appears unusually scared due to his/her difficulty breathing.

### Infant

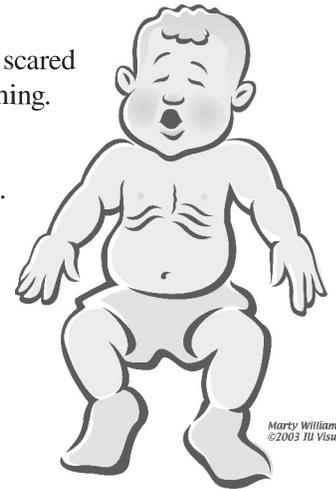
- Unable to nurse or take bottle.

### Child

- Cannot finish sentence without extra breath.

**If your child or infant has any of the additional symptoms below call 911 or go to the emergency room:**

- Lips or nail beds are gray or blue.
- Difficult to walk or talk.
- Cannot stop coughing.
- Extreme difficulty breathing- breathing is hard and fast.
- Medicine is not helping.
- Nostrils open wide.



Marty Williams  
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## ASTHMA TRIGGER CONTROL PLAN

### What are triggers

Because you have asthma, your airways are very sensitive. They may react to things called triggers (things that can cause asthma episodes). When you are around triggers, your breathing tubes may become swollen, tighten up, and make a lot of mucus. This will make it harder for you to breathe.

It is important to find out what your asthma triggers are and learn ways to avoid them.

**If you are allergic, AVOID allergens.**

### Outdoor Allergens

#### Pollens, and Mold Spores

- Try to stay indoors during the midday and afternoon when the pollen count is high.
- Use air conditioning, if possible.
- Keep windows closed during seasons when pollen and mold are highest.
- Avoid sources of molds (wet leaves, garden debris, mulch).

### Indoor Allergens

House Dust Mites, Mold Spores, Animal Dander, Cockroaches

#### House Dust Mites (tiny spider-like insects)

- Cover your mattress and box spring in an airtight plastic cover.
- Cover your pillow in an airtight cover.
- Wipe plastic covers once a week with a wet soapy cloth.

- Wash the drapes in your bedroom once a week.
- Do not store old clothes or shoes in the bedroom closet.
- Dust the bedroom every day with a damp cloth. Use a damp mop once a week to reach places such as tops of doors and window frames, tops of lampshades, and closet shelves.
- Bare floors are best, but washable throw rugs can be used if washed each week.
- Wash your bedding and stuffed toys once a week in hot water (130 degrees F). Be sure to decrease the water temperature to 120 degrees F after washing - may scald!
- Stuffed animals may be placed in the freezer overnight once a week to kill mites.
- Reduce indoor humidity to less than 70%. Use a dehumidifier if needed.
- Keep furnace filters clean - dirt-clogged filters may cause dust to be blown into the house.

### Indoor Molds

- Keep bathrooms and kitchens well aired.
- Clean bathrooms and kitchens regularly.
- DO NOT use humidifiers.
- Reduce indoor humidity to less than 70%, use a dehumidifier if needed.

### Animal Dander

Dander is the flakes from the skin. All animals have skin so there is no such thing as an allergen-free dog or cat. The length of a pet's hair does not matter. The allergen is in the saliva (cats), urine (rats), and dander (cats and dogs).



- Remove the animal from the house or school classroom or daycare.
- If you must have a pet, keep the pet out of the asthmatic child's bedroom at all times.
- If there are forced air vents in the home with a pet, close the air ducts to the asthmatic child's bedroom.
- Wash the pet weekly - even cats.
- Avoid visits to friends or relatives with pets.
- Choose a pet without fur or feathers (fish).
- Avoid products made with feathers (pillows, comforters).
- Avoid overstuffed pillows.

### Cockroach Allergen

- You may use insect sprays, but make sure the child with asthma is out of the house at that time.
- Air out the home for a few hours after spraying.
- Use roach traps.
- Use odorless sprays.
- Remove food sources.

## Irritants

### Tobacco Smoke

- DO NOT SMOKE.
- DO NOT ALLOW SMOKING IN THE HOME OR THE CAR.
- Have a household member smoke outside if they must smoke.
- Smokers should wear a smoking jacket (worn only when smoking outside) and leave it outside.

### Wood Smoke

- Avoid using a wood burning heat stove or wood fireplace.
- Avoid using kerosene heaters.

### Strong Odors and Sprays

- Do not stay in your home when it is being painted.
- Avoid perfume and perfumed cosmetics such as talcum powder and hair spray.
- Do not use room deodorizers.
- Use non-perfumed household cleaning products.
- Reduce strong cooking odors by using a fan and opening windows.

### Air Pollutants

- Avoid air pollution by staying indoors on days when the pollution count is high.

### Other Things to Do

- Avoid people with colds or the flu.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Get a flu shot every year.
- Eat a balanced diet.
- Work out an exercise plan with your doctor.

