

# Asthma - Learning to Control Your Symptoms

Asthma is a long-term lung disease that narrows airways and causes shortness of breath, wheezing, chest tightness, and coughing. People with asthma are sensitive to certain things that make their asthma worse, called triggers.

## Triggers: Things That May Trigger Asthma Attacks

- Allergens (air pollution, dust, mold, pollen, or pet dander)
- Exercise, heartburn, strong emotions, and stress
- Sulfites (food preservative in red wine, beer, salad bars, dehydrated soups)
- Strong scents (perfume, spray-on deodorants, cleaning products, or car exhaust)
- Colds, flu (influenza), and respiratory infections
- Smoke such as tobacco smoke or wood smoke
- Aspirin and ibuprofen
- Very cold or very hot weather

## What to do if...

Pollen and mold cause your symptoms:

- Stay in air-conditioned places with the windows closed during warm months or high pollen season.
- Change the filter on your heating and cooling system often.
- Clean and air out bathrooms, kitchens and basements often.
- Keep the level of humidity (moisture) in your home under 50% (using an air conditioner or a dehumidifier).

Dust causes your symptoms:

- Wash bed sheets weekly in hot water.
- Cover mattresses and pillows in airtight covers.
- Remove or clean carpets and drapes to reduce dust.
- Try to avoid stuffed animals, dried flowers and other things that catch dust.

Pets cause your symptoms:

- If you have a pet, keep it out of your bedroom.
- Clean home well and use a HEPA filter to clean air.

Your health care provider will be able to tell you what medicine is appropriate for your treatment.

**Important:** Do not allow people to smoke in your house or car.

## Get Medical Help Immediately / Warning Signs

Get medical help immediately if:

- Your peak flow keeps dropping or falls below 50% of your best.
- Your quick relief medicine won't relieve your symptoms.
- Your fingernails or lips turn gray or blue.
- You have trouble walking or talking.
- You have extreme difficulty breathing.
- Your nostrils flare when you breathe.
- Your neck, chest or ribs are pulled in when you breathe.

You can tell when you are to have an asthma attack or are at risk of having one if you look for these symptoms:

- Tightness in the throat or chest
- Feeling tired or having less energy
- A high or scratchy voice
- Peak flow 20% below your best
- Coughing or wheezing
- Shortness of breath

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