



What you need to know about Asthma

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease, which means people who have it will always have it. When you have asthma, it causes the airways in your lungs to swell up and makes it hard to breathe. This can cause coughing, wheezing (a high pitched sound coming from your chest) and shortness of breath. People with asthma will find that it is hard to breathe when they are exposed to certain things. These things are often called “triggers”. Examples of triggers are:

- Dust, pollen, cigarette, cigar or pipe smoke
- Allergies to animals such as dogs or cats, dust in carpets, beds, pillows and stuffed toy animals
- Colds or viral infections may cause an asthma attack

Different people can have different triggers, but for everyone with asthma, triggers will cause asthma symptoms to “flare-up” or get worse.

I Have Asthma, What Should I Do?

- See your Doctor he or she can tell you if you have asthma and how to control your asthma
- Have your doctor teach you how to use a peak flow meter
- Record your peak flow readings like your doctor tells you, (usually once in the morning and once at bedtime)
- Be sure to ask your doctor for a prescription for a “spacer” to be used with inhaled asthma medications and have your doctor show you how to use the spacer correctly
- Learn what your “triggers” are and try to stay away from them
- Be sure to take your medicine as ordered by your doctor
- Ask your doctor to complete an Asthma Action Plan
- Be sure to get a yearly flu vaccine
- Ask your doctor if you have questions about your asthma and or asthma medications
- Call our Asthma Disease Management program (toll-free) at 1-866-593-2538

What tests are done to tell me whether I have asthma?

Your doctor will do a physical exam and ask questions about your health. If your doctor feels you have asthma, once a year your doctor will do a simple test in the office called “Spirometry.” You will be asked to breathe into a small

plastic device which will measure the amount of air in your lungs when you breathe in and when you breathe out. This test can help the doctor decide what medications to order and determine how well your asthma is being controlled.

What Medications are used for Asthma?

Your doctor will decide which medicine is the best to use based on your symptoms and how often you experience asthma attacks. The most common types of medications used to treat asthma are:

- Inhaled Corticosteroids: these medications are inhaled and help decrease swelling in the lungs, minimize frequency of attacks and help control your asthma, these medicines are not the same as the steroids often used by athletes, ask your doctor if you have questions about them. Examples of these medications are: Azmacort, Flovent, and Advair.
- Short-Acting Bronchodilators: these medications work fast, they are used when you are having trouble breathing. You should always carry this medicine with you. Examples of these medications are: Alupent, and Proventil.
- Long-Acting Bronchodilators: these medications may be inhaled or taken by mouth and are used to decrease the amount of asthma attacks. Examples of these medications are Servent, Aminophylline, and Theophylline.
- Leukotriene Modifiers: these medications are taken by mouth and are taken everyday, they are often used to help control asthma triggered by allergies or exercise. An example of this medication is Singulair.

References: American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (1997), American Academy of Allergy & Immunology (1997), Expert Panel Report: Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma Update on Selected Topics 2002. National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. NIH Publication No. 02-5074 June 2003

These Clinical Practice Guidelines are only a general guide and are not intended to replace your doctor’s judgment. Always talk with your doctor to be sure you are getting the right examinations, treatment, testing and care recommendations.