Breathe Easy
A Family Guide to Living with Asthma
What Is Asthma?

*Asthma* is a disease of the lungs. It’s a chronic (long-term) condition that affects the small airway tubes that carry air into and out of the lungs. When you have asthma the airways are swollen, making them narrow. This makes it hard for air to get in and out.

The airways are also very sensitive, and react to many different things in the environment known as *asthma triggers* (things that make your asthma flare-up). Coming in contact with asthma triggers can cause *asthma symptoms* (coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and chest tightness) making it hard for your child to breathe.
What Does Asthma Feel Like?

Asthma is not the same for everyone. Some children have only occasional, mild symptoms or may only have symptoms after exercising. Others have severe asthma that if not treated can greatly limit how active they are, and can cause changes in the way the lungs work.

Know your child’s symptoms and have an Asthma Action Plan so you can act quickly when symptoms begin. Acting early can keep symptoms from getting worse.

Find common asthma symptoms hidden in this puzzle:

★ COUGH
★ TIGHT CHEST
★ TIRED
★ OUT OF BREATH
★ WHEEZING

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C H T T D V C O U H D O
O U I T F T P E A T H U
U K G L W K I D N I K T
C K H L D K Q R D C K O
F D T K K V D G E X T F
I W C D C V E F T D E B
N K H W H E E Z I N G R
G T E E D K W E E Z K E
D K S K K J M L U N T A
Q E T D E D V H T U M T
W E F F D C E C O U G H
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## What Can I Do About Asthma Triggers?

Asthma symptoms or flare-ups (sudden, more frequent and worsening of symptoms) happen when an asthma trigger irritates the lungs. Below are some common triggers and what you can do to help your child avoid them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trigger</th>
<th>Prevention Measures</th>
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</table>
| **Dust, Dust Mites**     | Dust with a damp cloth and vacuum with a HEPA vacuum cleaner at least once a week when your child is not home.  
                           | Use allergen or impermeable dust-proof zippered covers on mattresses and pillows.  
                           | Wash sheets and blankets once a week in hot water (130 degrees fahrenheit). |
| **Cats, Dogs or Other Animals** | Keep pets out of sleeping areas.  
                                | Keep the doors to bedrooms closed.  
                                | Keep pets off upholstered furniture or vacuum upholstered furniture at least once a week.  
                                | Avoid products made with feathers, for example, pillows and comforters. |
| **Cockroaches, Mice & Rats** | Don’t leave food or garbage out.  
                                | Clean up spills and store food in airtight containers.  
                                | Keep food out of the bedrooms.  
                                | Avoid bug sprays which can trigger flare-ups. Use baits or traps instead. |
| **Mold**                 | Use exhaust fans or open windows when cooking or showering.  
                           | Fix leaky plumbing or other unwanted sources of water.  
                           | Replace any moldy ceiling tiles or carpet.  
                           | Use a dehumidifier in damp basement areas. |
**Tobacco Smoke**
- If you smoke, quit.
- Until you quit, do not smoke in the house or car and don’t let anyone else do so.
- Encourage household members to quit smoking, or smoke outside.
- For free telephone counseling, call 800-QUIT NOW (800-784-8669) or visit smokefree.gov for other quit smoking programs.

**Pollen, Outdoor Mold, Changes in Weather or Seasons**
- Keep windows closed during pollen season and when mold counts are high.
- Visit pollen.com and check out the allergy forecast in your area.

The room below is filled with asthma triggers. Can you spot them all?
How Can Asthma Be Treated?

Asthma is treated with two types of medicines:

**Controllers** are used every day to prevent and keep asthma symptoms in control.

**Relievers** are used as needed for quick relief of asthma symptoms.

### Controllers

**What do Controllers do?**
- Reduce irritation, swelling and mucus in the airways.
- Prevent asthma flare-ups.
- Help the lungs stay healthy and strong.

**When do you use a controller?**
- Every day as directed by your child’s health care provider. These medicines take time to work but over time your child will have fewer asthma symptoms.
- Do not use a controller for sudden asthma symptoms or a flare-up (attack).

**What are some examples of controller medicines?**
- Pulmicort® (budesonide)
- Advair® (fluticasone/salmeterol)
- Singulair® (montelukast)

**What controller medicine is your child taking?**

**Not taking one?** Ask your child’s health care provider if your child could benefit from a daily controller medicine.

### Relievers

**What do relievers do?**
- Relax the muscles around the airways.
- Work right away to relieve asthma symptoms.
- Relieves asthma symptoms for about 4 to 6 hours.

**When do you use a reliever?**
- As needed for quick relief of asthma symptoms or a flare-up.
- Before exercise or activity, if directed by your child’s health care provider.
- Your child should have a reliever medicine with them at all times for sudden symptoms.
- If your child uses a reliever medicine more than two days per week, your child’s asthma may not be in control. Contact the health care provider to discuss.

**What are some examples of reliever medicines?**
- ProAir® HFA (albuterol)
- Xopenex® HFA (levalbuterol)
- Ventolin® HFA (albuterol)

**What reliever medicine is your child taking?**

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**Children who use a metered dose inhaler (MDI) usually need a spacer (a chamber added on to an inhaler) to get the medicine into their lungs.**
Find the short path to the reliever medicine. Then try to find the long path to the long-term controller medicine.

Got questions about asthma medicines? Ask your child’s health care provider or pharmacist.
What is an Asthma Action Plan?

Everyone with asthma should have an Asthma Action Plan in writing. This written plan from your child’s health care provider should be reviewed at least once a year. This plan provides information and instructions on how you can manage your child’s asthma. It includes:

- Reminders about taking controller medicines every day, even when one feels well.
- Recognizing when asthma symptoms are getting worse and when to take reliever medicine.
- When to see the health care provider.
- What to do in an emergency.

If your child doesn’t have an Asthma Action Plan, discuss completing one with your child’s health care provider.

A Peak Flow Meter is a device used to check how well your child is breathing. Using one may even show if a flare-up is coming, sometimes before any symptoms appear. Peak flow meters may not be suitable for children under 5.

Check with the health care provider to see if your child can benefit from a peak flow meter.
# Pediatric Asthma Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth Date:</td>
<td>Doctor/Nurse Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent/Guardian Name &amp; Phone:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important! Avoid things that make your asthma worse:</td>
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</table>

**Personal Best Peak Flow:** __________

## GREEN ZONE - YOU'RE DOING WELL! ➤ Use these controller medicines everyday.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You have all of these:</th>
<th>Peak flow from</th>
<th>MEDICINE/ROUTE</th>
<th>HOW MUCH</th>
<th>HOW OFTEN</th>
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<tr>
<td>Breathing is good</td>
<td>__________</td>
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<tr>
<td>No cough or wheeze</td>
<td>to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleep through the night</td>
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<td>Can go to school and play</td>
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- Take your reliever inhaler: __________ minutes before exercise.

## YELLOW ZONE - CAUTION ➤ Continue with GREEN ZONE medicine and add reliever medicine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You have any of these:</th>
<th>Peak flow from</th>
<th>MEDICINE/ROUTE</th>
<th>HOW MUCH</th>
<th>HOW OFTEN</th>
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<tr>
<td>First signs of a cold</td>
<td>__________</td>
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<td>Cough</td>
<td>to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mild wheeze</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tight chest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coughing, wheezing or trouble breathing at night</td>
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CALL YOUR DOCTOR/NURSE: __________

## RED ZONE - DANGER - GET HELP NOW! ➤ Take these medicines and call your doctor now.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your asthma is getting worse fast:</th>
<th>Peak flow from</th>
<th>MEDICINE/ROUTE</th>
<th>HOW MUCH</th>
<th>HOW OFTEN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliever medicine is not helping</td>
<td>__________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Breathing is hard and fast</td>
<td>to</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nose opens wide</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Ribs show</td>
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<td>Can’t talk well</td>
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GET HELP FROM A DOCTOR NOW! If you cannot reach your doctor, go directly to the emergency room or call 911 and bring this form with you. DO NOT WAIT!

Make an appointment with your doctor/nurse within two days of an ER visit or hospitalization.
What Can I do to Help Control My Child’s Asthma Symptoms?

• Identify and help your child avoid his/her asthma triggers.
• Fill out an Asthma Action Plan with your child’s health care provider.
• Understand and give your child’s medicines as directed.
• Keep a diary of symptoms.
• Ask your child’s health care provider about a flu vaccine.
• Take your child for regular asthma check-ups.
• If you or a family member smoke, quit!

Test Your Knowledge

1. True or False:
   Knowing your child’s asthma symptoms and acting quickly may help avoid a more serious flare-up.

2. True or False:
   Tracking asthma symptoms can help overall asthma control.

3. True or False:
   You should call your child’s doctor if your child needs reliever medicine more than two times a week (other than before exercise) to control asthma symptoms or flare-ups.

4. True or False:
   Having control of asthma symptoms means few to no symptoms, sleeping through the night with no coughing or wheezing, and participating in normal daily activities (school, play or sports).

Answer Key:
Turn upside down to check your answers.

1. True
   2. True
   3. True
   4. True
## Symptom Tracker

Keeping detailed records may help you, your child and health care provider learn how to lessen or prevent future asthma flare-ups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cough</th>
<th>Wheezing</th>
<th>Chest tightness</th>
<th>Shortness of breath</th>
<th>Sleep problems due to asthma symptoms</th>
<th>Asthma symptoms with physical activity</th>
<th>Used reliever medicine</th>
<th>Used daily controller medicine</th>
<th>Peak Flow</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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Want to Learn More About Asthma?
Find fun & educational asthma activities such as these . . .

. . . at harvardpilgrim.org
To discuss your child’s asthma, call our nurses at 866-750-2068.