

Module 2: Knowing Your Breathing

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How Can I Take Care of Myself If I Have Asthma?

There are many ways to take care of yourself if you have asthma. You can do things that will help prevent asthma attacks, like staying away from the things around you that can cause you to have an attack. These things are called triggers.

It is important that you figure out what triggers an asthma attack for you. One way to do that is to keep a notebook where you write down what you were doing and where you were each time an attack starts. That may help you figure out what your triggers are. Many people have triggers such as dust, smoke, chemicals, animal hair, mold, cockroaches, or exercise. Weather can have an effect, too. For example: rainy days, blowing leaves, strong winds or cold air can all be **triggers**.

Some people with asthma also have allergies to certain things and when they are around those things, it can cause an asthma attack. Some everyday foods can cause serious problems for people with allergies. These include milk, nuts, fish, eggs or things made with wheat. If you have allergies and asthma, it is especially important that you stay away from the things you are allergic to in order to reduce the chance that they will lead to an asthma attack.



What Else Can I Do?

People with asthma should have a plan about how to deal with their asthma. The plan needs to be written down by your doctor and it should give you instructions on what you need to do to take care of yourself. This plan is called an **Asthma Action Plan**.

Your asthma action plan is about you and your needs. The plan should include a list of your usual asthma medicines (including **quick relief medications**), along with instructions on how much to take and when to take them. It should also tell you what to do when you feel your asthma getting worse and when you need to call your doctor. Most importantly, it should tell you what to do in an asthma emergency, like going to the emergency room or calling 911.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Medical record #: _____ Physician phone number: _____

Patient goal: _____

Important! Your triggers to avoid: _____

Personal best peak flow: _____

The colors of the traffic light will help you use your asthma medicines.

Green means: Go Zone!
Use preventive medicine.

Yellow means: Caution Zone!
Add quick-relief medicine.

Red means: Danger Zone!
Get help from a physician.

GO

You have all of these:

- Breathing is good
- No cough or wheeze
- Sleep through the night
- Can work and play

Peak flow from _____ to _____

CAUTION

You have any of these:

- First signs of a cold
- Exposure to known trigger
- Cough
- Mild wheeze
- Tight chest

Peak flow from _____ to _____

DANGER

Your asthma is getting worse fast:

- Medicine is not helping
- Breathing is hard and fast
- Your lips turn blue
- Ribs show
- Can't talk well

Peak flow from _____ to _____

Use these daily preventive anti-inflammatory medicines:

Medicine	How much	How often/when

Continue with green Go Zone medicine and add:

Medicine	How much	How often/when

Take these medicines and call your family physician now.

Medicine	How much	How often/when

Get help now! Do not be afraid of causing a fuss. Your physician will want to see you right away. It's important! If you cannot contact your family physician, go directly to the emergency room. DO NOT WAIT. Make an appointment with your family physician within two days of an emergency room visit or hospitalization.

Physician's signature: _____

(Picture from American Academy of Physicians)

How are a traffic light and an asthma action plan alike?

Asthma action plans are often divided into red, yellow, and green parts, just like a traffic light!


- The **green part** is about when you are not having any breathing problems and you feel good “to go”. You still need to take any medicine that your doctor has given you to take everyday even if you feel fine.
- The **yellow part** tells you what to do if you are not feeling very good and you think your asthma may be getting worse. The yellow part tells you to “slow down” whatever you were doing and pay attention to your asthma. What you do next will decide whether you will get better or whether you will get worse. Follow the plan the doctor has given you. It is very important to take any fast-acting or rescue medicine your doctor has given you to help keep your asthma from getting worse.
- The **red part** of the asthma action plan tells you what to do when you are in danger such as when you are having an asthma attack. Follow the plan the doctor has given you, but if your asthma is very bad and it doesn’t get better after you take your rescue medicine, you or someone where you are should call 911 for help right away.



You should work with your healthcare provider to determine your zones.


Sample Asthma Action Plan: Green Zone

A reading in this zone means that your asthma is pretty good. It would be good to just continue what you have been doing to keep your asthma in this zone. This may be taking a daily medication to prevent asthma symptoms or staying away from certain triggers.

 WHEN WELL <i>Asthma under control (almost no symptoms)</i>		ALWAYS CARRY YOUR RELIEVER WITH YOU
Your preventer is: <small>[NAME & STRENGTH]</small>		Peak flow* [if used] above:
Take puffs/tablets times every day		OTHER INSTRUCTIONS <small>[e.g. other medicines, trigger avoidance, what to do before exercise]</small>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use a spacer with your inhaler		
Your reliever is: <small>[NAME]</small>		
Take puffs		
When: You have symptoms like wheezing, coughing or shortness of breath		
<input type="checkbox"/> Use a spacer with your inhaler		

Sample Asthma Action Plan: Yellow Zone


When your Asthma symptoms are like the yellow zone, it means your airways are getting smaller and it's harder for you to breathe. Your symptoms can get better or worse depending on what you do. It's important to figure out which medication you should use when this happens and how you should use it.

 WHEN NOT WELL <i>Asthma getting worse (needing more reliever e.g. more than 3 times per week, waking up with asthma, more symptoms than usual, asthma is interfering with usual activities)</i>	
Keep taking preventer: <small>[NAME & STRENGTH]</small>	Peak flow* (if used) between and
Take puffs/tablets times every day	OTHER INSTRUCTIONS <input type="checkbox"/> Contact your doctor <small>(e.g. other medicines, when to stop taking extra medicines)</small>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use a spacer with your inhaler
Your reliever is: <small>[NAME]</small>
Take puffs
<input type="checkbox"/> Use a spacer with your inhaler


You and your doctor or community health worker should have a plan for the yellow zone.

Sample Asthma Action Plan: Red Zone

If your symptoms get worse than the yellow zone, you may be having severe breathing problems. Take your rescue medications right away!

 IF SYMPTOMS GET WORSE <i>Asthma is severe (needing reliever again within 3 hours, increasing difficulty breathing, waking often at night with asthma symptoms)</i>	
Keep taking preventer: _____ <small>(NAME & STRENGTH)</small>	Peak flow* (if used) between _____ and _____
Take _____ puffs/tablets _____ times every day	OTHER INSTRUCTIONS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Contact your doctor today <small>(e.g. other medicines, when to stop taking extra medicines)</small>
<input type="checkbox"/> Use a spacer with your inhaler	Prednisolone/prednisone:
Your reliever is: _____ <small>(NAME)</small>	Take _____ each morning for _____ days
Take _____ puffs	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Use a spacer with your inhaler	_____

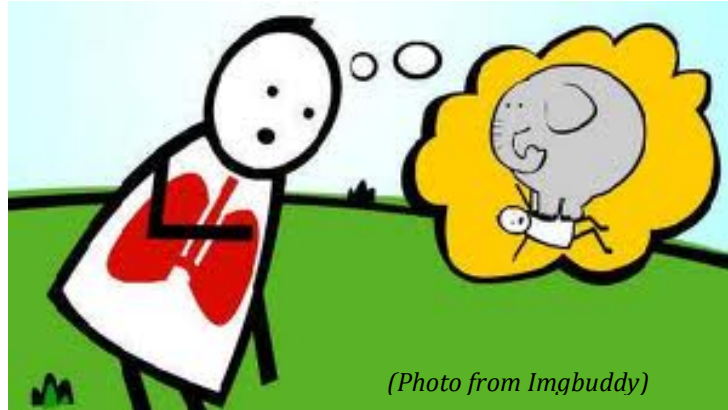
If your breathing does not get better with the medication, you need to make sure you get emergency help!

 DANGER SIGNS <i>Asthma emergency (severe breathing problems, symptoms get worse very quickly, reliever has little or no effect)</i>	
DIAL 000 FOR AMBULANCE	Peak flow (if used) below: _____
	Call an ambulance immediately Say that this is an asthma emergency Keep taking reliever as often as needed

How Can I Tell If I Might Have an Asthma Attack?

Most people with asthma notice certain changes in themselves or signs that an asthma attack might be coming. Those signs are different for everyone, so it is important to pay attention to your body and what it might be telling you.

Some of the signs that people notice are a cough that doesn't go away, a runny or stuffy nose, a sore throat, sneezing, watery eyes, or feeling very tired.



Right before an asthma attack starts, people may have trouble talking or say that it is hard for them to breathe or that their chest hurts. Many people with asthma can feel an attack coming on when they have a kind of tightness in their chest or start coughing.

It is very important that you learn the signs that your body gives you that your asthma is getting worse. When you see or feel those signs, you should follow the instructions in your asthma action plan right away.

Early Warning Signs

Think back to your last asthma attack. Did you have any of the signs below? It's important for you as well as those close to you to know what are some signs that you need to control your asthma. Here is a list from [AIM for Health Lungs](#):

- Itchy chin
- A cough that doesn't go away, especially at night
- Itchy, scratchy, or sore throat
- Waking up at night
- Dark circles under eyes
- Runny, stuffy or congested nose
- Increased tiredness
- Mood Change-grouchy or extra quiet
- Thirst
- Itchy, glassy or watery eyes
- Rubbing nose a lot
- Sneezing
- Stomach ache
- Headache
- Fever
- Feeling restless
- Change in face color-pale or flushed
- Throat clearing
- Eczema flare-up

Signs that an Asthma Attack is Starting

Signs that an asthma attack is starting... ACT FAST!

- ☐ Cough
- ☐ Wheeze
- ☐ It feels hard to breathe out
- ☐ Chest feels "tight" or hurts
- ☐ Breathing faster than normal
- ☐ Get out of breath easily
- ☐ Other: _____

If you experience any of the warning signs above, follow your Asthma Action Plan and contact your doctor if necessary.

Danger Signs: Asthma Attack

DANGER SIGNS! This is an asthma attack!

- Bluish, gray or dusky color to lips and nail beds
- Trouble walking
- Trouble talking, can't speak in whole sentences
- Skin between ribs or above breastbone sucks in when breathing
- Fast heartbeat or pulse
- Nostrils flare when breathing
- Quick-relief medications do not work

**If you experience any of the warning signs above, this is a medical emergency!
Get help now, or call 911!**

Helpful Hints to Avoid an Asthma Attack

The best time to plan for an asthma attack is long before one happens, at the doctor's office. The best way you can prepare is by talking with your doctor and your family to make sure you have a clear **Asthma Action Plan**.



Here are some helpful tips to remember when you start noticing your breathing get worse:

- Stay calm, and try to relax the best that you can. It isn't easy! But if you start to freak out, your breathing will actually get worse!
- Tell any adult. Whoever is around – teacher, coach, parent. Someone will be able to help you, or get you help, if you need it. Don't try to deal with it alone!
- Take the **quick-relief medication** as your Asthma Action Plan tells you to. Not sure which medication is the quick-relief one? Ask your doctor or community health worker *before* you need it so you are prepared.
- If your breathing gets worse and the quick-relief medicine hasn't helped in 5-10 minutes, call the doctor or 911.
- If it is an emergency, keep taking the quick-relief medicine every 5-10 minutes until the ambulance arrives.

Great job! You're one step closer to finishing the CHECK Asthma Online Program. Hopefully you now know more about asthma and medications to help control it.

Now you can move onto the next topic and learn all about medications for asthma attacks.

