

## Helpful Information For You!

If you would like additional information on asthma, you can contact one of the following:

### **The American Lung Association®**

61 Broadway, 6th Floor  
New York, NY 1000  
Phone: 1-800-LUNG-USA  
(1-800-586-4872)  
<http://www.lungusa.org>

### **American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology**

611 East Wells Street;  
Milwaukee, WI 53202  
Phone: (800) 822-2762  
[info@aaaai.org](mailto:info@aaaai.org)

### **National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute- Health Information Center**

P. O. Box 30105  
Bethesda, MD 20824-0105  
Phone: (301) 592-8573  
[nhlbiinfo@rover.nhlbi.nih.gov](mailto:nhlbiinfo@rover.nhlbi.nih.gov)

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# Complete Wellness: A Guide to Managing Your Health

## What is Asthma?

Asthma Series, R7

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**A**sthma is a breathing problem that makes it hard for you to get air in and out of your lungs.



Do you experience coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing, or tightness in your chest? Being aware of these symptoms may help you know if you are having an asthma attack.

### What Makes Asthma Worse?

Asthma symptoms don't just happen - Some things make asthma worse. Things that make your asthma worse are called "triggers." Asthma triggers are different for everyone. Knowing what causes your asthma attacks will help you avoid them and give you more control.

## What Makes Asthma Worse?

Here are some common asthma triggers:

- Pollen from plants
- Mold/mildew
- Some medications
- Animal droppings
- Cigarette smoke
- Some foods

## Staying Away From Your Triggers Is the Key!

- Use "allergy-proof" covers for your mattresses and pillows.
- Avoid outdoor activities during allergy season.
- Avoid animals that may make your asthma/allergies worse such as dogs, cats, or birds.
- Fix any water leaks to prevent mold and mildew from growing.
- Avoid smoky places such as fireplaces, barbeque grills, or smoking areas.
- Stay away from strong odors such as perfume, paint, and hair spray.
- Change your heat/air conditioning filter at least once a month.

## Can My Asthma Be Treated?

Yes! Your asthma can be treated. Asthma symptoms can be prevented or controlled with the right medications. There are two main groups of asthma medications.

*Ask your doctor, nurse, and/or pharmacist about the information contained in this brochure*

Fast-acting medications are used to provide relief for a short period of time. These "rescue medications," help open up the airway to let more air get to the lungs. They help stop asthma attacks after they have started. These medicines usually begin to work 5-10 minutes after you take them. They should be taken within 5 minutes after symptoms begin. This class of drugs includes:

- **Albuterol**
- **Combivent®**

Long-acting medications are used to help prevent asthma attacks from starting. These "control medications" help keep your airways open all the time so that you don't have an attack. This class of drugs includes:

- **Accolate®**
- **Advair®**
- **Cromolyn**
- **Flovent®**
- **Pulmicort®**
- **Serevent®**
- **Singulair®**
- **Theo-Dur®**

The long-acting medications should be taken every day to prevent an asthma attack, even if you do not have symptoms. Your doctor will decide which medications are right for you. You may be taking one or more medicines to help control your asthma. It is very important that you learn when to use your fast-acting medication for relief to help stop an attack and how to use your long-acting medication for control to help prevent an attack from occurring. If you only have a long-acting medication and not a fast-acting medication, talk to your doctor about the importance of having a "rescue medication" for your asthma attacks.

## What Should I Do If I Have An Asthma Attack?

Asthma attacks can happen very suddenly. Attacks can be severe, moderate, or mild. During any kind of attack, only take medicines that your doctor has given you for your asthma. During a mild or moderate attack, you will feel tightness in your chest and you might make a whistling sound when you breathe. These types of attack are more common. If you have a mild or moderate attack, take your asthma medication as directed by your doctor. In a severe attack, you will become breathless and have trouble talking. Get help right away! Go to your doctor's office, or to an emergency room



## Tips For Using Your Inhaler:

Hold your breath for 10 seconds after inhalation.

- Wait one minute between puffs.
- Do not block inhaler with your tongue.
- Do not use inhalers with gum or other objects in your mouth.
- Wash mouth out with water after using long-acting inhalers to prevent fungal infections in your mouth and throat.
- Spacers help to get more medicine to your lungs. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse for more information.



## How Can I Tell if My Medication is Working?

Using a peak flow meter to see how well air flows from your lungs can help you control your asthma. Your doctor can use the measurements to figure out what asthma medications are right for you. A peak flow meter can help you know if you are using your medications correctly, and warn you of an asthma attack even before you feel the symptoms. You can also use your meter during asthma attacks to see how bad the attack is. Talk with your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse to get more information on using a peak flow meter.

## Learn How to Control Your Asthma So That it Does Not Control You.

- Figure out what triggers your asthma symptoms and try to stay away from these things.
- Learn the correct way to use your inhaler.
- Find out how a spacer and a peak flow meter will help you control your asthma.
- It is important to understand when to use your fast-acting "rescue medications," to help stop an attack, and when to use your long-acting "control" medications to help prevent an attack.
- Don't use your fast-acting medication more often than what your doctor prescribed without talking to your doctor.