

A Kid's Guide to Asthma

What is an asthma attack?

An asthma attack is when you have trouble catching your breath.

You know what it's like—your chest feels tight and it's hard to breathe. You might cough or wheeze. You feel too tired to play.

When you breathe, air goes in and out of the lungs through your airways. But since you have asthma, your airways are always a little red and swollen. During an asthma attack, they swell up even more, which makes it very hard to breathe.

In 2000, more than one quarter of the swimmers on the US Olympic team had asthma and used inhalers.

Asthma didn't hold them back and asthma shouldn't hold YOU back!

Why does it happen?

Many different things can trigger an asthma attack. Some common triggers are:

- Dust in your house
- Tobacco smoke
- Dirty air outside
- Cockroach droppings
- Pets
- Mold
- Hard exercise that makes you breathe really fast
- Some medicines
- Bad weather
- Some kinds of food

Feeling worried about something can cause an asthma attack. Even getting really excited, or feeling very mad, sad or scared can cause an asthma attack.

How is asthma treated?

There are different kinds of asthma medicine. Some people take pills to help them breathe better. Many use an inhaler to breathe in the medicine. (An inhaler is a little can of special air. You squirt the air into your mouth and then breathe in.)

- When you need help breathing **right now**, you will take a “quick relief” medicine (called a “reliever”). Most people take this with an inhaler.
- You will also take everyday medicine (called “controller medicine”) to help prevent asthma attacks. Even if you feel fine, you need to take this each day.

You and your doctor will make a plan to treat your asthma. Think of your plan like a stoplight.

Remember, you are the most important person on your asthma team. Your doctor, family and friends are here to support you.

Don't be afraid to ask questions—the more you know about your asthma, the better you will be at taking care of yourself.

Green Light = Safe Zone

When the light is green, it's safe to keep going. You feel good and your asthma doesn't bother you. Be sure to:

- Avoid your asthma triggers.
- Keep taking your daily medicine.

Yellow Light = Warning

Slow down—you're starting to have an asthma attack. Signs that an attack is starting:

Be sure to:

- Tell a parent or other adult.
- Use your inhaler or other “reliever” medicine.

Red Light = Danger

Stop and get help—you are having a full asthma attack. Signs that you are having an attack:

Be sure to:

- Ask a parent or other adult for help. Don't wait—do it now.
- Use your inhaler for quick relief.

What causes YOU to have an asthma attack?

Draw a picture of one of your asthma triggers. Or, write a short story about an asthma trigger and how you can control it.

Is it okay to exercise and be active?

Yes. In fact, exercise will help your asthma—*if* you follow these tips.

- Go easy. Start exercising slowly, and finish exercise with a cool-down.
- Play or exercise with a friend.
- Know your triggers. Stay away from the things that can trigger your asthma.
- Take breaks to help you catch your breath.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Do different activities. Try in-line skating one day, and then take a long walk the next day.
- Check air quality. Exercise outside only when the air is clean. Before you exercise, check the weather on TV or on a computer to see how clean the air is.
- Ask your doctor if you should take your medicine before you exercise.

How can I talk to my friends about asthma?

It's a good idea to tell your friends that you have asthma. This way, they won't be as scared if you have an asthma attack. They can also help you avoid the things that make your asthma worse.

If you're not sure what to say to your friends, ask your parents or doctor. They will help you find the right words. You can also read the comments below, then try to think of a response that will help your friends understand.

Friend: Will I catch asthma from you if we hang out together?

Your response:

Friend: Let's go to my house and play with my new kitten. (Oh no! You are allergic to pets!)

Your response:

Friend: One cigarette isn't going to hurt you.

Your response:

You CAN control your asthma!

Your doctor will help you make a plan just for you. A good plan means that:

- You won't have as many asthma attacks.
- You won't wheeze and cough as much, or maybe not at all.
- You will sleep better.
- You won't miss school.
- You can play sports and games outside and at school.
- You won't have to go to the hospital!

Always remember:

- Follow your doctor's orders.
- Learn what triggers your asthma—and how to control it. For example:
 - Never, ever smoke. If someone nearby wants to smoke, leave the room or ask them to go outside.
 - To control dust, keep your books and toys in a box with a lid. And don't lie down on carpet, since carpets can hold a lot of dust.
 - If your pet makes your asthma worse, try to keep it out of your room.
 - Other: _____
- If you have been running or playing and feel out of breath, stop and take a break.
- Know the warning signs of an asthma attack. Warning signs are different for everyone. What are your warning signs?
 - Feel tired and weak
 - Have trouble sleeping
 - Wheeze and cough more, especially at night
 - Breathe harder or faster
 - Feel tight in your chest
 - Feel out of breath
 - Other: _____
- Whenever you leave the house, always take your inhaler with you.