

# Healthy Living



**Healthy Living Newsletter**  
**All About Asthma**

**April 2007**

## **What Exactly Is Asthma?**

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America defines asthma as a disease of the lungs in which the airways become blocked or narrowed, making it hard to breathe. Asthma is a chronic disease that affects nearly 20 million Americans, but with proper management, people with asthma live healthy and active lives.

## **Have an Asthma Management Plan**

Having an asthma management plan is the best strategy to prevent symptoms. Along with your physician, you can develop a plan that allows you to control your asthma rather than allow your asthma to control you. Effective plans allow people to be active without asthma symptoms. Your plan needs four parts:

### **1. Identify and minimize contact with your asthma triggers.**

Avoiding your triggers is the best way to reduce your need for medication and to prevent asthma episodes. Be alert and learn what triggers your asthma episodes. Does your asthma flare up when you're near an animal? Exercising? Making the bed? When and where do episodes occur and how can you avoid or reduce your exposure to those conditions?

### **2. Take your medications as prescribed.**

Usually people take asthma medicines through one of several types of inhalers. But more than half of all people who use inhalers don't use them properly. Ask your physician or nurse to watch you and check your technique. A reservoir adaptor can be used to improve the delivery of inhaler medications to your lungs. Discuss each of your asthma medications with your doctor. The more you understand about what those medicines do and why they help, the more likely you are to use them consistently and correctly.

### **3. Stay aware so you recognize early warning signs.**

Fortunately, asthma episodes almost never occur without warning. Some typical early symptoms are coughing, chest tightness, and feeling very tired. The key to controlling your asthma is taking your medicine at the earliest possible sign of symptoms. Ask your doctor if you should use a simple, pocket-sized device called a peak flow meter. It detects narrowing in your airways for several hours, or even days, before you feel symptoms. Monitor your airways the same way people with high blood pressure monitor their blood pressure.

### **4. Know what to do when your asthma worsens.**

If you understand your asthma management plan and follow it, you will know exactly what to do in case of an asthma episode or an emergency. If you have any questions at all, ask your doctor.

*Source:* Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, [www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org). This information should not be a substitute for seeking responsible, professional medical care.

## **How To Sample Severe Asthma**

People with asthma already know its chest-clutching, short-of-breath feeling. But if you don't have asthma and want a taste of what it's like, try this experiment. Take two small straws, like the ones people use to stir coffee and tea. Clamp your lips tightly around the straws and hold your nose. Now breathe. Feel how hard your lungs work to get air in and out? Notice how quickly you become short of breath? That's a sample of full-blown asthma.

*Source:* [www.intelihealth.com](http://www.intelihealth.com); last updated March 15, 2006.



## Test Your Knowledge

Decide whether each statement is true or false. The answers appear below.

1. A nebulizer is an asthma drug in solid form.
2. Avoiding triggers is the safest, most logical, and most effective way to control asthma. It's equivalent to a cure for many people.
3. Asthma is a disease you are born with rather than a disease you develop later in life.
4. Every day 10,000 people in America have an asthma attack.
5. 25% of Americans suffer from both asthma *and* allergies.

*Answers: (1) False – A nebulizer is a device that creates a mist from your asthma drug, making it easier and more pleasant to breathe the drug into your lungs; (2) True; (3) False – Some people are born with asthma and some develop it later in life; (4) False – it's about 30,000; (5) True*

*Sources: www.aafa.org, www.intelihealth.com*

## Basic Steps for Controlling Indoor Allergens

Scientists are beginning to figure out ways to control indoor allergens and, thus, to control asthma attacks. The most common indoor allergens and irritants include dust mites, mold, animal dander, cockroach debris, smoke (from cigarettes, fireplace chimneys, woodstoves or other sources) and strong odors. But there are many other possible culprits – more than 2,000. Here are some basic ways to prevent exposure to these triggers. Have someone who does not have asthma or allergies perform these tasks:

- Vacuum and dust your home frequently.
- Remove objects that may harbor irritants (nonwashable rugs and draperies, air conditioners, dust collectors like stuffed animals, wicker baskets, dried flowers).
- Place mattresses and pillows in airtight covers.
- Clean heating ducts with chemicals that denature allergens (such as tannic acid) and kill dust mites (such as benzyl benzoate).
- Keep moist surfaces dry and free of mold.
- Inspect and clean major appliances before seasonal use.
- Change cooling and heating system filters according to manufacturers' instructions.

- Use a dehumidifier in humid weather; empty it and clean the reservoir daily.
- Use washable curtains and shades rather than heavy blinds or draperies.
- Keep water from seeping into your home.
- Fix leaky plumbing.
- Get rid of anything damaged by water.
- Ventilate your ceiling crawlspace.
- Maximize air flow throughout the house.
- Avoid wool and feather blankets and down comforters.

*Source: www.intelihealth.com*

## How Asthma Affects Us Every Day in America

**40,000 people miss school or work because of asthma.**

**30,000 people have an asthma attack.**

**5,000 people visit the emergency room because of asthma.**

**1,000 people are admitted to the hospital because of asthma.**

**14 people die from asthma.**

*Source: Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, 2006, www.aafa.org*