

Asthma: what is it?

Information to improve your health from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

Asthma is a chronic lung condition involving inflamed or narrowing airways which can make it very hard to breathe. During an asthma attack, you may feel like your chest is constricting and experience severe coughing and/or wheezing. Asthma attack triggers may include changes in air temperature, allergens, upper respiratory infections, various irritants in the environment and exercise.

Asthma and You

Prevention is always the best medicine.

To help control your asthma symptoms, it's important to stay educated and take proactive steps. Learn how to control your asthma and avoid environmental factors that can make it worse. Get your flu shot every year and schedule other necessary immunizations as part of your annual routine wellness visit.

The purpose of this newsletter is to help you control your asthma. We hope you find this information helpful.

Thank you for reading!



This information is provided for general informational purposes. Information contained in this communication is not intended to replace professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider regarding your healthcare needs. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay seeking medical advice because of something you have read in this informational piece. Always check your benefits for coverage information and limitations. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association.

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Tips for Controlling Your Asthma

1 Asthma should not prevent you from living a normal life.

First and foremost, asthma should not keep you from enjoying or doing the things you want to do with your life. People with asthma can study, work, enjoy hobbies, and participate in physical activities just like everyone else. Humans are social creatures. Having a career or hobbies that get you out of the house and among your peers may be crucial for a better quality of life. If your asthma affects your ability to participate in life, talk to your doctor. Your treatment plan may require adjustment.

2 Understand how asthma affects your body.

When you have asthma, it is there all the time. It is a chronic inflammation or narrowing of your airways. Just because you don't feel particularly bad on any given day doesn't necessarily mean your asthma is gone. You should still take medicines or follow your doctor's treatment plan as prescribed. Never stop taking medicine or change your treatment plan without first discussing your condition with your doctor.

3 Know what triggers can set off your asthma.

If you've had asthma for any length of time, you probably already know what triggers your symptoms. You probably know what you're allergic to and understand that things like tobacco smoke may worsen your asthma symptoms. One of the best ways of preventing a flare up is by simply avoiding substances or environmental factors that cause them.

4 Your asthma should be watched closely.

Asthma symptoms can very well change over time. While it can get better, there is not a cure. Symptoms may worsen or improve. When these changes happen, your treatment plan and medicines may require adjustment. Your treatment plan may be personalized by following your progress and tracking your symptoms.

5 Be your own advocate.

Your doctor is there to help you plan, but ultimately YOU are responsible for your asthma control. These are some things you can control:

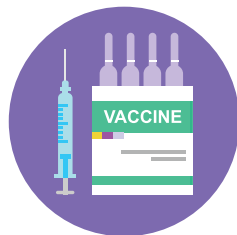
- Take medicines as prescribed.
- Look out for triggers or unusual symptoms and seek treatment when necessary.
- Avoid smoke, especially tobacco smoke.
- Discuss any new or worsening symptoms with your doctor.
- Go to your doctor's appointments and follow your treatment plan.

Winter Will Be Here Soon: Are You Ready?

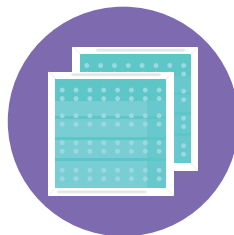
Winter weather can worsen asthma symptoms. The air is drier and colder; and respiratory infections are more common in winter. Here are five tips to help you enjoy this winter season.



WASH
your hands.



Get your
FLU SHOT.



Replace
HVAC FILTERS.



EXERCISE
smarter.



Take MEDICINES and
follow your treatment plan.



A Walk in the Woods

Just because you have asthma doesn't mean you should avoid outdoor activities. In fact, many outdoor activities provide amazing health benefits.

Take hiking for example. Technically, it's easy enough. You simply put one foot in front of the other and move from point A to point B. It's just a walk in the woods. But for something so simple, it provides a lot of health benefits including improved balance, stronger bones and muscles, increased aerobic fitness, can help control weight, and provides a natural mood boost by simply being in nature. Study after study shows enjoying the outdoors increases your vitamin D levels and improves mental health.

However, cold air, higher altitudes, physical exertion, environmental allergies, and animal dander can all trigger asthma attacks. Know your body so you know what to expect and plan accordingly.

Trail Safety Tips

Don't Hike Alone

If you're on a well-populated trail system or only hiking a short distance, you may be able to get away with hiking alone. However, if you're in a remote spot or attempting a longer distance, such as a multi-day hike, bring along a friend who knows about your asthma and can help if you have an attack. Not only is this safer, it can be a lot more fun to share your experience.

Check the Weather

Be aware of potential changes in temperature. This can be especially important if you are triggered by cold air. Also, take advantage of your favorite tool or resource to check the air quality index where you plan to hike.

Have an Asthma Action Plan

Know your asthma action plan and communicate it to anyone in your hiking group. This plan should outline your medicines and when to use them, describe what symptoms may need attention, and explain what to do in case of an asthma attack. Consider talking to your doctor to create this plan if you don't already have one in place.

Pack an Emergency Bag

This should include:

- Your daily inhaler or other medicines.
- An emergency/rescue inhaler.
- Antihistamine medicine.
- An epinephrine auto-injector if you have moderate-to-severe allergies to insect stings, poison ivy/oak, or other environmental factors.

An asthma attack in a remote and isolated spot can be scary. But with proper planning, asthma should never keep you from enjoying the outdoor activities you love.

We offer members a support system to help manage any chronic condition, as well as preventive measures to take better care of yourself. Call **1-888-841-5741** for more information on these services.



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