



MDwise

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Asthma: Taking Charge of Your Asthma

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Overview

Even though asthma is a lifelong condition, treatment can help you feel and breathe better and help keep your lungs healthy.

If you have been recently diagnosed with asthma, it may seem like there are a lot of things to remember. But with some practice, these things will become part of your normal routine. Some ways you can take charge of your asthma include using an asthma action plan, knowing the asthma zones, and working with your doctor.

How to take charge of your asthma

Use an asthma action plan

Using an asthma action plan can help you stay active and have fewer asthma problems. Following your plan is a big step toward controlling your asthma so you can live the life you want.

- Take the daily medicines as described in your action plan.
 - This can keep asthma under control and help you avoid asthma attacks. It may also help limit long-term lung damage.
- Watch for patterns in your symptoms.
 - If your doctor recommends it, check your peak expiratory flow as often as your doctor tells you to. For many people this is twice a day, morning and evening. This is a good way to know how well your lungs are working.
 - Use an asthma diary to track your peak flow readings, your symptoms, and your asthma triggers. And if you have an attack, write down what you think triggered it, the symptoms, and what medicine you took for quick relief.
- Follow your action plan when you are having symptoms.
 - Check yourself for asthma symptoms to know which step to follow in your action plan. Watch for things like being short of breath, having chest tightness, coughing, and wheezing. Also notice if symptoms wake you up at night or if you get tired quickly when you exercise.
 - If your peak flow decreases or you have symptoms, follow your action plan to see what asthma zone you are in. It'll tell you what to do when you are in each zone.

Know the asthma zones

Asthma zones are part of your asthma action plan. The zones are defined by your symptoms, your peak flow, or both. Knowing what zone you're in can help you know how well your asthma is under control and if you need help.

The three zones are:

Green zone.

Green means good. This zone is where you want to be.

When you're in the green zone, one or more of these things may be true:

- You don't have any symptoms.
- You're able to do your usual activities and can sleep without having symptoms.
- Your peak flow (if you check it) is 80% to 100% of your personal best measurement.

Yellow zone.

Yellow means caution. If you're in this zone, it may mean you're having an asthma attack or that your medicine needs to be increased.

When you're in the yellow zone, one or more of these things may be true:

- You may not have any symptoms, but your lung function is reduced.
- When symptoms are present, you may cough, wheeze, or feel short of breath, or your chest may feel tight. Or your asthma may limit your activities or wake you up at night.
- Your peak flow (if you check it) is 50% to less than 80% of your personal best measurement.

Red zone.

Red means DANGER. If you're in this zone, you may be having a severe asthma attack. Being in the red zone is dangerous. If you're in the red zone, you need to take action right away.

When you're in the red zone, one or more of these things may be true:

- You may be very short of breath.
- You can't do your usual activities.
- You use your chest muscles to breathe. The skin between, above, and under the ribs collapses inward with each breath (retractions).
- You wheeze. But if your symptoms are very severe, you may not hear any wheezing. Wheezing will stop when the amount of air moving through the bronchial tubes becomes dangerously low. In this case, no wheezing is actually worse than hearing wheezing.
- Your quick-relief medicine doesn't help.
- Your peak flow (if you check it) is less than 50% of your personal best measurement.

Work with your doctor

Here are some ways to partner with your doctor to keep your asthma under control.

- Work with your doctor to make an asthma action plan.
 - You and your doctor will make an asthma action plan that outlines the two approaches to taking charge of your asthma:

- Controlling asthma over the long term. Controller medicine helps reduce the swelling of your airways and prevent attacks.
- Treating attacks when they occur. The action plan will outline the steps to take and medicine to use to treat asthma attacks.
- Let your doctor know what you want regarding asthma care. For example, if you are not sure how to use your inhalers, tell your doctor.
- If you make an asthma action plan for your child, give a copy to the child's school or caregivers and make sure they know how to use it.
- Have regular checkups with your doctor.
During checkups, your doctor will ask if your symptoms or your peak flow, or both, have held steady, improved, or gotten worse. You will also be asked if you have asthma symptoms during exercise or at night. This information can help your doctor know if the severity of your asthma symptoms has changed or if you need to change medicines or doses.

When you go to the doctor:

- Take both your asthma action plan and your asthma diary. Get answers to any questions you have about your asthma plan or your symptoms.
- Let your doctor know if treatment is not controlling your asthma symptoms.
- Take your peak flow meter (if you use one) and your medicines so your doctor can review your treatment and the way you use the meter and medicines.
- Make sure you know how and when to call your doctor or go to the hospital.
- Tell your doctor if you are not able to follow your action plan.

Related Information

- [Asthma Action Plan](#)
- [Asthma: Identifying Your Triggers](#)

Credits

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Author: Healthwise Staff

Medical Review:

E. Gregory Thompson MD - Internal Medicine

Adam Husney MD - Family Medicine

Elizabeth T. Russo MD - Internal Medicine

Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.



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