



QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a lung disease that makes it difficult to breathe. The airways that carry air in and out of the lungs are like tubes. During an asthma attack, the airways tighten up and narrow. They may also fill with a thick fluid called mucous. When this happens, there is little space for air to pass in and out, making breathing difficult.

What are the signs of an asthma attack?

- A tight feeling in the chest
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing (making a whistling sound when breathing)

It is important to get medical care during an asthma attack. It is possible to die from an asthma attack.

What sets off or triggers asthma attacks?

Some triggers may include:

- Colds that affect the head, nose and chest
- Cigarette smoke
- Dirty air
- Hard exercise
- Allergies to the following:
 - dust
 - pollen, a fine dust from plants
 - mold

- certain foods
- dander, the skin flakes from animals
- stress
- changes in the weather

What tests are used to check for asthma?

- Blood tests
- Skin tests that detect what a person is allergic to
- Chest X-rays
- Breathing test

How is asthma treated?

- Stop smoking and stay away from people who smoke.
- Keep the house clean and dust-free.
- Put a dust cover on the mattress and pillows.
- Learn to stay away from things that trigger asthma attacks.
- Take asthma medication at the same time every day.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Get enough rest.
- Keep all doctor appointments.
- Talk to your doctor to learn about your disease and how to control it.

Types of inhalers

- One type of inhaler is used every day to prevent problems.
- The other type of inhaler is called a rescue inhaler. This type is only used during an asthma attack.

How do I use an inhaler?

- Take off the cap.
- Shake the inhaler.
- Breathe out all of the way.
- Hold the inhaler to your mouth. The canister should be pointing up.
- Put your lips tightly around the mouth piece. **If your medicine is a steroid, keep the inhaler one to two inches away from your mouth** (If you are not sure about this, call your doctor).
- Tilt your head back, slightly.
- Slowly breathe in through your mouth.
- Press down on the inhaler one time.
- Keep breathing in as deeply as possible.

If you are using a “spacer,” wait five seconds after pressing the inhaler (If you are not sure what kind of inhaler you have, call your doctor).

- Slowly breathe in.
- Hold your breath and slowly count to 10. Then breathe out.
- Wait one to three minutes before using your inhaler again.
- You may gargle with water and blow your nose. This will remove any medication that is left over. This will reduce soreness in the mouth. It will also reduce the chance of infection in the mouth.

Emergency Medications

- Always carry your inhaler and medications to use for a possible asthma attack.
- Let friends and family know that you have asthma.
- **If you are having trouble breathing, call 911.**

How do I care for my inhaler?

- Clean the mouthpiece every day.
- Take off the medication canister.
- Wash the mouth piece in warm water and a mild dishwashing soap.
- Let the mouth piece air dry.
- When the mouth piece is dry, put the cap back on it.
- Soak the mouth piece once a week. Use two cups of water mixed with ¼ cup vinegar. Soak it for 20 minutes.
- Get a new mouth piece every six months.
- Keep the canister away from heat and cold.
- Do not put a hole in the canister.

Tip: To find out if your canister has medication in it, put it in a bowl of water.

- If the inhaler **sinks**, it is full of medication.
- If the inhaler **floats half way up**, it is half full of medication.
- If the inhaler **floats to the top**, it is empty.
- Throw empty inhalers in the trash can.

How do I live with asthma?

Know the signs of an asthma attack and what to do (The signs of an asthma attack are on the first page. Read them again if you do not remember.).

- An attack may start slowly and get worse.
- An attack may come on quickly, making it very difficult to breathe.

What should I do if I feel an attack coming on?

- Sit straight up in a chair.
- Try to relax.
- Breathe through your nose.
- Pucker your lips like you are going to whistle.
- Breathe out slowly from your puckered lips.
- Breathing out should take three or four times longer than breathing in.
- **Breathe out gently. Do not force it.**
- If you feel dizzy, slow down your breathing.

How can I find a Doctor?

St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in the treatment of asthma. To contact one of our doctors, please call:

Physician Referral Line at 1.800.223.8662

Visit our Web site at www.stvincentcharity.com

St. Vincent Charity Hospital

2351 East 22nd Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
216.861.6200
TTY: Ohio Relay 1.800.750.0750

Saint Luke's HealthCare Center

11201 Shaker Boulevard
Cleveland, Ohio 44104
216.721.6900

Community Resources

American Lung Association

6100 Rockside Woods Blvd.
Independence, Ohio 44131
216.524.5864

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America

1233 20th St. NVV Suite 402
Washington D.C. 20036
1.800.7.ASTHMA

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