

SECTION 3: ASTHMA MANAGEMENT

THE ASTHMA HANDBOOK



Because asthma is a chronic disease, you must manage it at all times, even when you feel fine. When you manage your asthma well, you can:

- lead a normal life
- sleep well without interruptions
- exercise
- do the activities you want to do
- attend work or school without interruption

If you have a lot of symptoms or asthma attacks, your asthma is not under proper control. Ask your doctor or certified asthma educator for help.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR ASTHMA IS WELL MANAGED?

Take the 30 Second Asthma Test®:

Do you cough, wheeze, or have a tight chest because of your asthma? (4 or more days a week)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Does coughing, wheezing, or chest tightness wake you at night? (1 or more times a week)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Do you stop exercising because of your asthma? (In the past 3 months)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Do you ever miss work or school because of your asthma? (In the past 3 months)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Do you use your rescue medication (blue puffer) 4 or more times a week? (Except 1 dose per day for exercise)	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO

If you answer YES to one or more questions, talk to your doctor or certified asthma educator about how you can better manage your asthma.

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HOW TO MANAGE YOUR ASTHMA

1. Educate yourself about asthma.
2. Use your asthma action plan when you have breathing problems.
3. Use a diary form to record your symptoms.
4. Avoid triggers.
5. Take your medications as directed by your doctor.
6. Use your medication delivery device properly.
7. Avoid getting the flu, colds and viral infections.
8. Exercise regularly.

1. Educate yourself about asthma.

The information found in this handbook is based on current Canadian guidelines for the management of asthma. These guidelines were developed by a group of family doctors and lung specialists from across Canada. To learn more about asthma, you can also talk to a certified asthma educator, who has special training in asthma management. To find a certified educator, call The Lung Association nearest you (1-888-566-LUNG).

2. Use your action plan when you begin to have breathing problems.

Your asthma action plan is a written set of instructions developed with your doctor. It explains what medication you should be taking on a regular basis when you are feeling well and how to increase your medication if you start to have breathing problems. Your asthma action plan takes the guesswork out of what your symptoms mean. Studies show that people who use their asthma action plan have better asthma control.

Ask your doctor or health-care provider to fill out the asthma action plan on the next page with you. Make sure you understand what the plan means. If you have any questions, ask your doctor. You can also discuss your action plan with a certified asthma educator.

An asthma action plan can be used with or without a **peak flow meter** to help you manage your asthma. A peak flow meter is a handheld tool that measures how fast you can blow air out of your

Name _____

Doctor _____

Date _____

Doctor's Phone Number _____

GREEN LEVEL My asthma is under control.

SYMPTOMS

- My breathing is normal.
- I have no trouble sleeping.
- I'm not coughing or wheezing.
- I can do all my normal activities.

PEAK FLOW

_____ to _____ (80% to 100% of your personal best)

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

I should continue using my normal medications as directed by my doctor, and re-measure my peak flow every _____ weeks / months.

Medication	Dose	Take it when?

YELLOW LEVEL My asthma is getting worse.

SYMPTOMS

- I have symptoms, like wheezing or coughing, with activity or at night. They go away when I use my reliever.
- I'm using my reliever more than ___ times a week/day.
- I can't do many of my usual activities.

PEAK FLOW

_____ to _____ (60% to 80% of your personal best)

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

A problem is beginning. I should increase my medication as specified below until I am in the green level for _____ days or more. **If my symptoms do not improve within 4 days, I will call my doctor.**

Medication	Dose	Take it when?

RED LEVEL I am having an asthma emergency.

SYMPTOMS

- My breathing is difficult.
- I'm wheezing often when resting.
- I'm having difficulty walking and/or talking.
- My lips and/or fingernails are blue or grey.
- My reliever does not help in 10 minutes OR is needed every 4 hours or more.

PEAK FLOW

_____ to _____ (less than 60% of your personal best)

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

I NEED TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL EMERGENCY RIGHT AWAY.

I SHOULD USE MY RELIEVER AS MUCH AS I NEED TO ON THE WAY THERE.

lungs. This measurement is called your peak flow rate. The more open the airways are (the easier it is to move air in to and out of the lungs), the higher the peak flow number will be.

A peak flow meter is useful for tracking whether your asthma is under control. However, a peak flow meter is not for everyone. Talk to your doctor to see if a peak flow meter can help you manage your asthma.

3. Use a diary form to record your symptoms.

A diary form can help you keep track of your symptoms on a daily basis. Working with your doctor (or certified asthma educator), you can use your diary form to see if there is a pattern to your asthma symptoms (for example, are there certain days or times when you asthma is worse?). The diary form can show if changes to your asthma medications are relieving your breathing problems. If you use a peak flow meter, a diary form can also show trends in your peak flow rates and warning signs for worsening asthma (shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing and chest tightness), which can help you to manage your asthma.

How should I use a diary form?

To help track your symptoms or breathing problems, use numbers from 1 to 3 (where 1 means symptoms are barely present, 2 means symptoms are obvious, 3 means symptoms interfere with normal activity). Place the number in the time of day when you have the breathing difficulty. For example, if you have some shortness of breath while awake on Thursday, you would put a 1 in the box under Thursday day.

You should also list the asthma medications that you take in the asthma medications section. Record when you take each medication. For example, if you take your anti-inflammatory while awake on Thursday, you would put one check in the box under Thursday day. If you take it two times while awake on Thursday, you would put two checks in the box under Thursday day.

HAVE YOUR SYMPTOMS DISAPPEARED?

If you are symptom-free, talk to your doctor. Your doctor may slowly reduce your medication (according to your asthma action plan) and you may eventually not have to take it. However, you should always carry a rescue inhaler just in case.

4. Avoid your triggers.

Each person has specific triggers. Know your triggers so you can avoid them. Follow the suggestions listed in **Section 2: Asthma management**.

5. Take your medications as directed by your doctor.

It is important to take your asthma medications exactly as prescribed by your doctor. You should always have a filled prescription. You always have asthma, even if you are feeling okay and you aren't having breathing problems. That's why it is important to keep taking your medication.

MY ASTHMA DIARY FORM

Name _____

Doctor _____

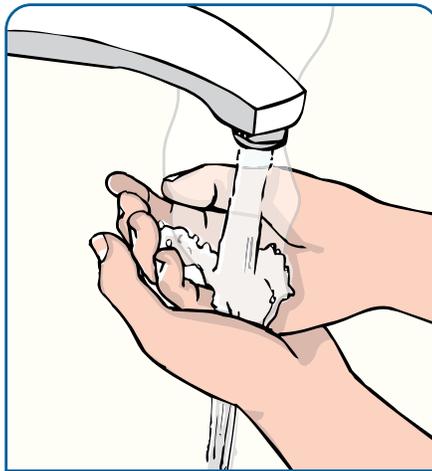
Date _____

Doctor's Phone Number _____

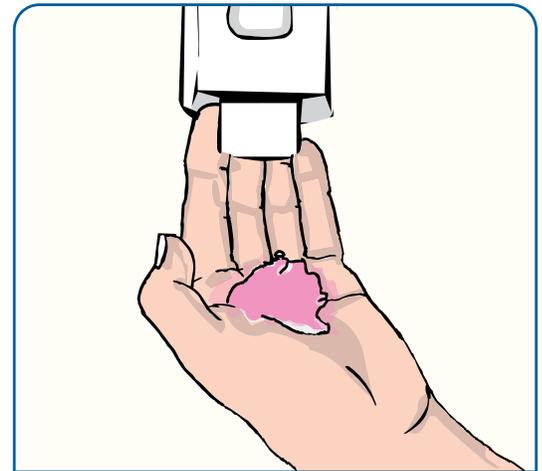
	SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY	
SYMPTOMS	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night
Shortness of breath														
Coughing														
Wheezing														
Chest tightness														
OTHER	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night
Missed work due to asthma														
Saw a doctor for asthma symptoms														
Went to emergency because of asthma														
PEAK FLOW READINGS	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night
500														
400														
300														
200														
100														
0														
ASTHMA MEDICATIONS	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night	Day	Night

LEGEND **1** Symptoms are barely present **2** Symptoms are obvious **3** Symptoms interfere with normal activity

FIGHT GERMS BY WASHING YOUR HANDS!



1 Wet your hands



2 Soap



3 Lather and scrub - 20 sec

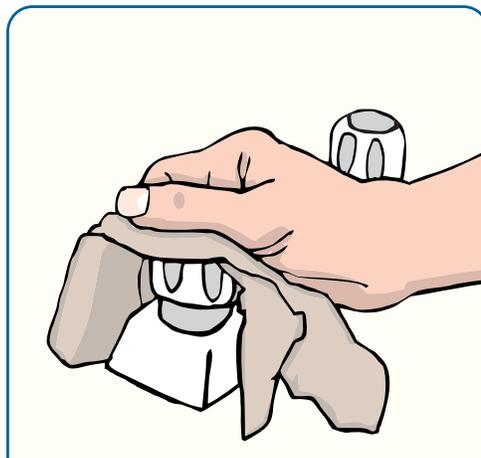


DON'T FORGET TO WASH:

- between your fingers
- under your nails
- the tops of your hands



4 Rinse - 10 sec



5 Turn off tap



6 Dry your hands

If you have questions about the medications or how to take them properly, talk to your doctor. Taking your medication regularly means you can avoid asthma emergencies. You can find more information about asthma medications in Section 4.

6. Use your medication device properly.

If all the asthma medication is not getting to where it is needed in the airways, it is not helping you manage your asthma. Ask your doctor or certified asthma educator to watch you take a puff of your medication. They may offer suggestions on how to improve your technique so that the medication is delivered more effectively to your lungs.

7. Avoid getting the flu, colds and viral infections.

Viruses, such as the cold and the flu, can infect your airways and lungs. Viral infections can produce asthma symptoms, especially in children. If you have a runny nose or cough up mucus from your lungs, you may have a virus. If you have a virus, pay attention to your symptoms. If your symptoms get worse, follow the directions in your asthma action plan.

Here are some ways to prevent viral infections:

Get a flu shot each fall. Flu shots provide some protection against influenza (the flu) that is caused by viruses. (Note: if you have an allergy to eggs, you should not get the flu shot because eggs are used to make the flu vaccine. Ask your doctor about your options.)

Wash your hands. Proper hand washing can help reduce the spread of infection, including the flu. Always wash your hands:

- before eating or preparing meals
- before breastfeeding
- after using the toilet
- after helping your child use the toilet or changing a diaper
- after blowing your nose or wiping your child's nose

8. Exercise regularly.

People with asthma can exercise safely. In fact, regular exercise can strengthen your immune system and help you fight off colds and infections. Exercise should not be avoided due to the asthma. For more information on **Exercise and Asthma**, see Section 7.

SHOULD YOU SEE A SPECIALIST?

Talk to your doctor about a referral to a specialist if:

- You are taking asthma medications and avoiding triggers but your asthma is not getting better.
- You think your work environment may be making your asthma worse.
- You have been admitted to the hospital or gone to the emergency room because of your asthma.