Developing an Asthma Action Plan

While asthma can't be cured, it can be controlled. At one time, the diagnosis of asthma kept athletes out of the game. That is no longer the case. There is no reason that a young person with asthma cannot live a normal, active, and productive life, including successful and enjoyable participation in sports.

As a result of medical advances and awareness of the disease, asthmatic athletes receiving proper treatment can achieve high levels of performance in sports. The key to success is two-fold: proper diagnosis and developing an asthma action plan with a physician. Continued management will help to prevent future attacks and control symptoms.

What to Expect From your Asthma Treatment Goals

- No symptoms or minor symptoms of asthma (symptoms include wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness)
- Sleeping through the night without asthma symptoms
- No time off from school or work due to asthma
- Full participation in physical activities
- No emergency room visits or stays in the hospital
- Little or no side effects from asthma medicine
- Do not accept having symptoms as normal.

Goal: Full participation in physical activities.

Your Asthma Can Be Controlled

Asthma is a chronic disease that can be controlled with proper, long-term treatment. But it cannot be cured. People with asthma have Airways that react to certain things called triggers --

- things like smoke or dust
- Airways that sometimes become narrow and blocked**.** T
- this causes wheezing, coughing, or trouble breathing Airways that become inflamed and swollen.

Each of these features of asthma can be prevented or treated by:

- **Staying away from your triggers or controlling them**
- **Taking medicine that opens your airways**
- **Getting treatment for the inflammation**

Treating inflammation is very important in the control of moderate to severe asthma. This may mean the daily use of such medicines as inhaled steroids or cromolyn sodium. Both of these medicines are safe to take.

Treating inflammation is the advice given in the 1991 National Asthma Education Program's *Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma.*

Steps to take to control of your Asthma

1. Learn what things start or prompt your asthma symptoms. Then avoid or control them.
2. Respond quickly to warning signs of an asthma episode.
3. Make two treatment plans with your doctor: one for daily treatment and one for emergencies.
4. Take your medicine at the first warning sign of an asthma episode.

Learn What Things Start Your Asthma Symptoms and Control Them

Most asthma symptoms start when your airways are bothered by something. These things are called **triggers**. Your symptoms will be reduced when you stay away from or control your triggers. Your asthma will be more controlled!

- Dogs, cats, or other animals
- Colds or flu
- Pollen from trees, grasses, and weeds
- Dust or mold
- Strong odors from perfumes, paints, sprays, or other items
- Smoke from cigarettes or from burning wood, paper, or other items
- Weather changes or very cold air
- Air pollution
- Crying, laughing, or yelling
- Exercising, what type of exercise?
- Aspirin or other medicine

Tell your doctor what your triggers are.

1. Ask your doctor how to control your triggers.
2. Make a plan with your doctor to take your medicines when you cannot avoid a trigger.
3. Respond Quickly to Your Warning Signs of an Asthma Episode

Most asthma episodes or attacks start slowly. Most people can tell when an asthma episode is coming. **"I learned that when my chest started getting tight, my asthma was going to act up. Now I take my asthma medicine when my chest starts to feel tight. I have prevented many asthma episodes this way. Once I learned this, I felt more in control."**

Deborah, asthma patient

You can often stop an asthma episode when you catch it early and take your medicine. If you fail to do this, your symptoms may get worse. Learn what your warning signs are. Make a plan with your doctor or nurse about what to do when you notice your warning signs.

- Drop in peak flow rate
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Tightness in your chest
- Wheezing
- Faster breathing
- Itchy or sore throat

Talk with your doctor about your warning signs.

- Tell your doctor your warning signs.
- Plan what you should do when your warning signs occur. Follow the plan you and your doctor make. This often means taking your medicine and resting. By knowing what to do when you notice early warning signs, you will feel more in control.
- Ask about other times when you should take your medicine. This may be the first sign of a cold or flu. It may be before you exercise. Or it may be before you come into contact with something you're allergic to.

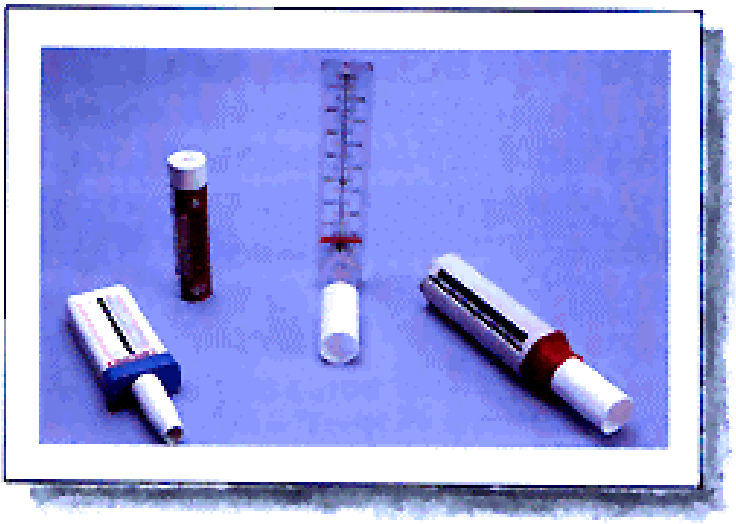
Ask your doctor about using a peak flow meter.

- A peak flow meter can tell you when an asthma episode is coming -- **even before you feel symptoms.** Taking medicine before you feel symptoms can stop the episode. People over age 4 with moderate or severe asthma should use a peak flow meter at least daily**.**

Write down what your doctor wants you to do when you feel a warning sign:

Make A Treatment Plan With Your Doctor and Follow It

- **Talk with your doctor about your different asthma medicines. Some medicines need to be taken daily to prevent asthma symptoms (inhaled steroids and cromolyn sodium). Other medicine can relieve your symptoms once your symptoms begin (medicine that opens your airways).**
- **Be sure to tell your doctor if you do not want to take a medicine. Also, call your doctor if you have any problems taking a medicine. Your doctor can often find something else for your asthma.**
- **Ask your doctor to show you how to use an inhaler. Then at each visit, show your doctor how you use your inhaler. Ask if you are using it the correct way. If you have trouble using an inhaler, ask about a spacer or holding chamber.**
- **Ask your doctor to show you how and when to use a peak flow meter. Then use the peak flow meter as he has instructed you to.**



Monitor your asthma with a peak flow meter.

How To Use Your Peak F low Meter

A peak flow meter is a device that measures how well air moves out of your lungs. During an asthma episode, the airways of the lungs usually begin to narrow slowly. The peak flow meter may tell you if there is narrowing in the airways hours sometimes even days before you have any asthma symptoms.

By taking your medicine(s) early (before symptoms), you may be able to stop the episode quickly and avoid a severe asthma episode. Peak flow meters are used to check your asthma the way that blood pressure cuffs are used to check high blood pressure.

The peak flow meter also can be used to help you and your doctor:
- Learn what makes your asthma worse
- Decide if your treatment plan is working well
- Decide when to add or stop medicine
- Decide when to seek emergency care

A peak flow meter is most helpful for patients who must take asthma medicine daily. Patients age 5 and older are usually able to use a peak flow meter. Ask your doctor or nurse to show you how to use a peak flow meter.

How To Use Your Peak Flow Meter

Do the following five steps with your peak flow meter:
1. Move the indicator to the bottom of the numbered scale.
2. Stand up.
3. Take a deep breath, filling your lungs completely.
4. Place the mouthpiece in your mouth and close your lips around it. Do not put your tongue inside the hole.
5. Blow out as hard and fast as you can in a single blow.

Write down the number you get. But if you cough or make a mistake, don't write down the number. Do it over again.
Repeat steps 1 through 5 two more times and write down the best of the three blows in your asthma diary.

Find Your Personal Best Peak Flow Number

Your personal best peak flow number is the highest peak flow number you can achieve over a 2- to 3-week period **when your asthma is under good control.** Good control is when you feel good and do not have any asthma symptoms.

Each patient's asthma is different, and your best peak flow may be higher or lower than the peak flow of someone of your same height, weight, and sex. This means that it is important for you to find your own personal best peak flow number.

Your treatment plan needs to be based on your own personal best peak flow number. To find out your personal best peak flow number, take peak flow readings:

- At least twice a day for 2 to 3 weeks.
- When you wake up and between noon and 2:00 p.m.
- Before and after you take your short-acting inhaled beta 2 -agonist for quick relief, if you take this medicine.
- As instructed by your doctor.

The Peak Flow Zone System

Once you know your personal best peak flow number, your doctor will give you the numbers that tell you what to do. The peak flow numbers are put into zones that are set up like a traffic light. This will help you know what to do when your peak flow number changes. For example:

Green Zone (more than ___ L/min [80 percent of your personal best number]) signals ***good control***. No asthma symptoms are present. Take your medicines as usual.

Yellow Zone (between ___ L/min and ___ L/min [50 to less than 80 percent of your personal best number]) signals ***caution***. You must take a short-acting inhaled beta 2 -agonist right away. Also, your asthma may not be under good day-to-day control. Ask your doctor if you need to change or increase your daily medicines.

Red Zone (below ___ L/min [50 percent of your personal best number]) signals a ***medical alert***. You must take a short-acting inhaled beta 2 -agonist (quick-relief medicine) right away. Call your doctor or emergency room and ask what to do, or go directly to the hospital emer-gency room.

Record your personal best peak flow number and peak flow zones in your asthma diary.

Use the Diary To Keep Track of Your Peak Flow

Measure your peak flow when you wake up, *before* taking medicine. Write down your peak flow number in the diary every day, or as instructed by your doctor.

Talk to your Doctor about your Asthma Medicines

Name of medicine:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What special techniques do I need to know to take this medication?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

When and how much you should take

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How long to take it

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What does the medicine do and when will you feel it working

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What to do if you forget to take it

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Side effects and what to do about them

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

When to call the doctor _____

_____

Plan for an asthma emergency.

Ask your doctor what you should do in an emergency. Write the answers below.
What are the signs that tell you to seek care quickly?

What should you do if your medicines do not seem to be working?

Where should you go to get care quickly?

Should you call your doctor first or go to the emergency room?

What do you do if you have an asthma emergency very late at night?

When you call, what information will your doctor want (your symptoms, what medicines you have taken, when you took them, and your peak flow rate)?

_____

Peak Flow Diary

Personal Best _____

Day 1
AM _____
PM_____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 8
AM _____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 2

AM _____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 9

AM_____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 3
AM _____
PM_____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 10
AM _____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 4
AM _____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 11
AM_____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 5
AM _____
PM_____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 12
AM _____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 6
AM _____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 13
AM_____
PM _____

Symptoms _____

Puffs of Controller _____

Day 7
AM _____
PM_____

Symptoms _____
Puffs of Controller _____

Day 14
AM _____
PM _____

Symptoms _____
Puffs of Controller _____