**Asthma** occurs when the airways in the lungs become inflamed (swollen) and constrict (become smaller), making breathing difficult. No two people with asthma are alike. Asthma symptoms may come and go, but the asthma condition never completely goes away.

**Asthma affects the airways in three ways:**

1. It causes inflammation (irritation and swelling) of the lining of the airways. When the airway lining is inflamed, there is less room for air to flow in and out.
2. Tight bronchospasms are caused by a tightening of the muscles that surround the airways. This narrows the airway and prevents air from getting in or leaving the lungs.
3. Extra mucus that often blocks the airways.

**Asthma triggers** are anything that can make asthma worse. Each person has his or her own types of triggers. See page 2 for a list of things you can do to avoid your asthma triggers.

Many people with asthma need **daily asthma control medicine** to manage symptoms and prevent flare-ups. The best asthma control medicine is an **inhaled steroid** because it treats the inflammation of the airways. **This medicine must be taken every day as prescribed by the doctor to keep asthma under control.**

### Tools for Managing Asthma

- **Healthcare providers:** Partner with them to manage your asthma and see them at least once a year.
- **Medicine:** 1) Take the inhaled steroid medicine *every day* as prescribed by your doctor, whether you are having symptoms or not, 2) Limit the use of a quick-relief medicine such as albuterol to acute symptoms and pretreat for exercise if that is a trigger.
- **Limit tobacco smoke exposure:** 1) Quit smoking: call the Colorado QuitLine (1-800-QUITNOW) and ask your healthcare provider about other resources to help you quit, 2) Keep the home and car smoke-free and avoid smoke exposure of any type.
- **Control the environment:** Recognize triggers and talk to your healthcare provider about ways to avoid them.
- **Written asthma action plan:** Ask your healthcare provider to complete the asthma action plan to tell you what to do daily and what to do in case of an asthma flare-up.
- **Peak flow meter:** Use it to measure how open or narrow your airways are. The peak flow number is used as part of the Asthma Action Plan to help manage asthma.
- **Spirometry:** Shows how well your lungs are functioning. This test should be done by your healthcare provider at least once a year.
- **Allergy tests:** Show what you are allergic to so you can reduce exposure and get treatment.
How To Control Things That Make Your Asthma Worse
This guide suggests things you can do to avoid your asthma triggers. Put a check next to the triggers that you know make your asthma worse and ask your doctor to help you find out if you have other triggers as well. Then decide with your doctor what steps you will take.

Allergens

- **Animal Dander**
  Some people are allergic to the flakes of skin or dried saliva from animals with fur or feathers.

  **The best thing to do:**
  - Keep furred or feathered pets out of your home.
  - If you can’t keep the pet outdoors, then:
    - Keep the pet out of your bedroom and other sleeping areas at all times, and keep the door closed.
    - Remove carpets and cloth-covered furniture from your home.
      If that is not possible, keep the pet away from fabric-covered furniture and carpets.

- **Dust Mites**
  Many people with asthma are allergic to dust mites. Dust mites are tiny bugs that are found in every home—in mattresses, pillows, carpets, upholstered furniture, bedcovers, clothes, stuffed toys, and fabric or other fabric-covered items.

  **Things that can help:**
  - Encase your mattress in a special dust-proof cover.
  - Encase your pillow in a special dust-proof cover or wash the pillow each week in hot water. Water must be hotter than 130° F to kill the mites. Cold or warm water used with detergent and bleach can also be effective.
  - Wash the sheets and blankets on your bed each week in hot water.
  - Reduce indoor humidity to below 60% (ideally between 30-50%). Dehumidifiers or central air conditioners can do this.
  - Try not to sleep or lie on cloth-covered cushions.
  - Remove carpets from your bedroom and those laid on concrete, if you can.
  - Keep stuffed toys out of the bed or wash the toys weekly in hot water or cooler water with detergent and bleach.

- **Cockroaches**
  Many people with asthma are allergic to the dried droppings and remains of cockroaches.

  **The best thing to do:**
  - Keep food and garbage in closed containers. Never leave food out.
  - Use poison baits, powders, gels or paste (for example, boric acid). You can also use traps.
  - If a spray is used to kill roaches, stay out of the room until the odor goes away.

- **Indoor Mold**
  Fix leaky faucets, pipes or other sources of water that have mold around them.
  - Clean moldy surfaces with a cleaner that has bleach in it.

- **Pollen and Outdoor Mold**
  When pollen or mold spore counts are high:
  - Keep your windows closed.
  - Stay indoors with windows closed from late morning to afternoon, if you can. Pollen and some mold spore counts are highest at that time.
  - Ask your doctor whether you need to take or increase anti-inflammatory medicine before your allergy season starts.

Irritants

- **Tobacco Smoke**
  If you smoke, ask your doctor for ways to help you quit. Ask family members to quit smoking, too.
  - Do not allow smoking in your home or car.

- **Smoke, Strong Odors and Sprays**
  - If possible, do not use a wood-burning stove, kerosene heater or fireplace.
  - Try to stay away from strong odors and sprays, such as perfume, talcum powder, hair spray and paints.

Other things that bring on asthma symptoms in some people include:

- **Vacuum Cleaning**
  - Try to get someone else to vacuum for you once or twice a week. Stay out of rooms while they are being vacuumed and for a short while afterward.
  - If you vacuum, use a dust mask (from a hardware store), a double-layered or microfilter vacuum cleaner bag or a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter.

- **Other Things That Can Make Asthma Worse**
  - Sulfites in foods and beverages: Do not drink beer or wine or eat dried fruit, processed potatoes or shrimp if they cause asthma symptoms.
  - Cold air: Cover your nose and mouth with a scarf on cold or windy days.
  - Other medicines: Tell your doctor about all the medicines you take. Include cold medicines, aspirin, vitamins and other supplements, and nonselective beta-blockers (including those in eye drops).
  - Viral infections in the lungs (colds, bronchitis, flu).
  - Exercise.
  - Air pollution.
  - Weather/climate changes.

Developed October 2012. For more information, go to www.HealthTeamWorks.org or call (303) 446-7200.