



INSIDE:  
Your asthma  
action plan



Fall 2013

# Lifestyles for adults with Asthma

## Breathe easier with a healthy lifestyle

Your asthma symptoms may come and go, yet the disease is always with you. That's why you need to manage asthma every day, even if you're feeling fine. One way to do that? Lose weight.

Being overweight or obese can contribute to breathing problems. It may make asthma harder to control. Fortunately, losing weight can have the opposite effect. It may lessen asthma symptoms and decrease how often you need to use quick-relief medicine.

To lose weight and keep it off, you'll need to:

- Take in fewer calories from the foods you eat
- Burn off more calories through physical activity

### Staying active with asthma

Regular exercise helps control your weight and improves your overall health and well-being. Talk to your doctor before starting an exercise regimen, as intense physical activity may set off asthma symptoms in some people.

Once you've talked with your doctor, these steps can help prepare you for physical activity:

- Warm up before exercise and cool down afterward.
- Try asthma-friendly activities, such as walking, biking and swimming.

- Use your quick-relief inhaler before exercise if your doctor recommends it.

### Eating wisely

There's no special diet that will cure asthma. But a sensible diet can help manage your weight and boost your overall health. A healthy eating plan:

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts
- Limits saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and added sugars

## Real readers, real advice

Who knows more about living with asthma than those facing the same daily issues as you? We'd love to share your feedback to help support and inspire other members living with asthma. Just email us at [bcnccm@bcbsm.com](mailto:bcnccm@bcbsm.com) with any tips you'd like to share with other readers.

# Health checks

Every year, ask your doctor about these wellness checks. You may need some of them more than once a year.

- ✓ Update your action plan
- ✓ Review your quick-relief and long-term control medicines
- ✓ Take a pulmonary function test
- ✓ Check with your doctor to see if your pneumonia shot is up to date

## Reminder:

### Plan ahead for flu season

Hard to believe, but flu season is nearly upon us. Having a chronic condition like asthma puts you at increased risk for flu complications. Be sure to make an appointment with your doctor this fall to receive your flu shot.

## Care for your health

Our personalized program, *Care For Your Health*<sup>®</sup>, can help you find solutions to staying healthy with asthma. To access this program:

- Visit your plan's website
- Log in as a member
- Click on the Health and Wellness tab
- Click BlueHealthConnection<sup>®</sup>
- Click My Digital Health Coaching and then click *Care For Your Health*

## The emotional side of side effects

Have you been feeling unusually keyed up, anxious or a bit down lately? It's possible that your asthma medicine could be to blame.

Medicines can be invaluable for treating asthma and are safe and effective. But occasionally these medicines may also cause some changes in your mood or behavior. Mild emotional side effects can be unpleasant. But in rare cases, medicines might even trigger severe problems, such as hallucinations or thoughts of suicide.

You don't have to live with these problems, though. Learn what to look for — and know when to talk with your doctor.

### What to watch for

Take a look at the list of medications and their side effects below. Do any of the emotions sound familiar?

- **Beta-2 agonists** are inhaled medicines that come in both short-acting forms (various quick-relief inhalers) and long-acting forms (Foradil<sup>®</sup>, Serevent<sup>®</sup>, VoSpireER<sup>®</sup>). These medicines may cause an increase in heart rate and shakiness and may cause anxiety and nervousness in some people.

- **Leukotriene modifiers**

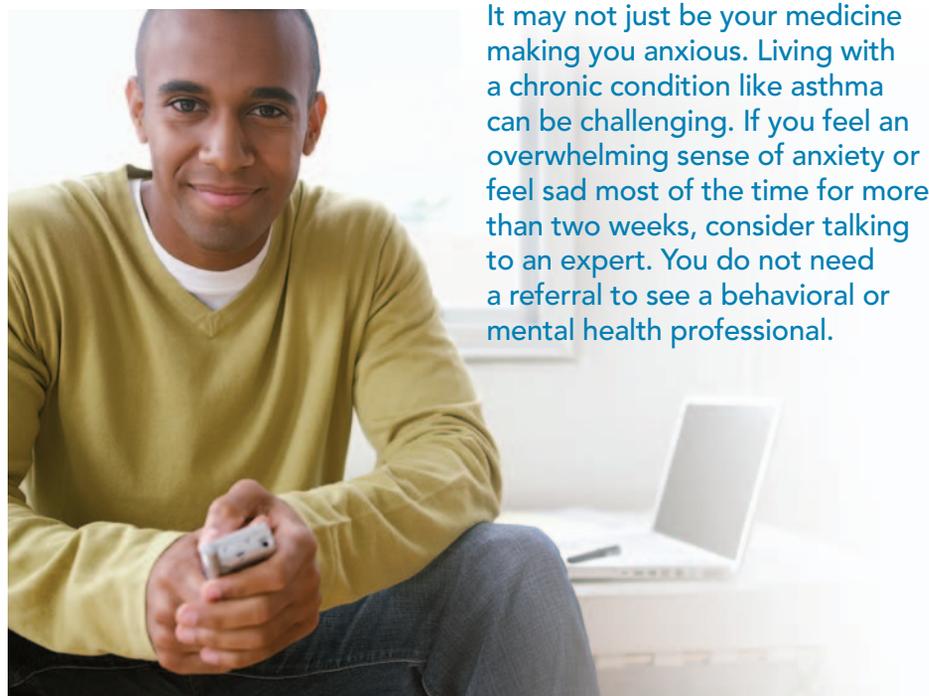
(Singulair<sup>®</sup>, Accolate<sup>®</sup>, Zflo CR<sup>®</sup>) are long-term control medicines that are taken every day to help keep asthma symptoms from starting. Possible side effects include agitation, anxiety, irritability, restlessness, aggression, depression, hallucinations and suicidal thoughts or behavior. Although these side effects are rare, contact your doctor immediately if they occur.

- **Oral corticosteroids** (cortisone acetate, dexamethasone, hydrocortisone, methylprednisolone, prednisolone, prednisone) are sometimes taken for short periods to get severe asthma under control. Possible side effects include nervousness, mood swings, restlessness, depression, insomnia and increased appetite.

If you're experiencing mood changes that may be tied to your asthma medicine, talk with your doctor about how to manage them. If necessary, your doctor can adjust your treatment plan.

### Need someone to talk to?

It may not just be your medicine making you anxious. Living with a chronic condition like asthma can be challenging. If you feel an overwhelming sense of anxiety or feel sad most of the time for more than two weeks, consider talking to an expert. You do not need a referral to see a behavioral or mental health professional.





# My asthma action plan

The colors of the traffic light will help you use your asthma medicines. Take this form to your doctor to fill out. Then make a copy for yourself and a copy to keep at your workplace or with a caretaker.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctor \_\_\_\_\_ Doctor's phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Hospital/emergency room phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Emergency contact \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

## GREEN ZONE means GO.

You have **ALL** of these:

- Breathing is good
- No cough or wheeze
- Sleep through the night
- Can work or play
- Peak flow above:

Use these medicines every day.

Medicine	How much to take	When to take it
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

For asthma with exercise, take:

\_\_\_\_\_

## YELLOW ZONE means CAUTION.

You have **ANY** of these symptoms:

- First sign of a cold
- Exposure to known trigger
- Cough
- Mild wheeze
- Tight chest
- Coughing at night
- Peak flow from:  to

Continue with GREEN ZONE medicine and ADD:

Medicine	How much to take	When to take it
First >	_____	_____
Next >	_____	_____

If a quick-relief or **YELLOW ZONE** medicine is needed more than two to three times a week, **call your doctor.**

## RED ZONE means DANGER!

Your asthma is getting worse fast:

- Medicine is not helping within 15 to 20 minutes
- Breathing is hard and fast
- Nose opens wide
- Ribs show
- Lips and/or fingernails are blue
- Trouble walking and talking
- Peak flow below:

Take these medicines and call your doctor.

Medicine	How much to take	When to take it
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Get help from a doctor now. Your doctor will want to see you right away. **It is important.** If you cannot contact your doctor, go directly to the emergency room. **DO NOT WAIT.** Make an appointment with your primary care physician within two days of an ER visit or hospitalization.

# My asthma action plan *continued*



## Asthma trigger checklist

Check all items that trigger your asthma and could make your symptoms worse. Talk with your doctor about how to best manage these triggers.

- Chalk
- Cigarette smoke and secondhand smoke
- Colds or flu
- Dust mites
- Exercise
- Mold
- Pests — cockroaches
- Pets — animal dander
- Pollen
- Poor air quality
- Strong odors, perfumes
- Sudden temperature change
- Wood smoke
- Foods: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Recognizing your triggers

When you have asthma, it's important to know what can trigger symptoms. Then you can find ways to control your environment to minimize or eliminate triggers. Common triggers include:



**Allergens:** Substances such as pollens, molds and animal dander can trigger asthma.



**Irritants:** Inflamed airways are sensitive to environmental irritants, including:

- Air pollutants, such as tobacco smoke, wood smoke and chemicals in the air
- Strong smells or sprays, such as perfumes, household cleaners or cooking fumes
- Changing weather, such as changes in temperature and humidity



**Infections:** Colds, flu and pneumonia can trigger or aggravate asthma.



**Exercise:** Physical exercise can trigger attacks in certain circumstances.



**Medicines:** Certain medicines, including aspirin, ibuprofen and beta-blockers, can cause or trigger asthma attacks in some people.



**Food:** Some foods or food additives can trigger symptoms. Foods to be careful with include dried fruit, processed potatoes, peanuts and shrimp.

If you don't know your triggers, try to limit your exposure to one possible trigger at a time. Watch to see if you get better. This may show you if the trigger is a problem for you.



## Is your house making you sick?

Some homes may have poor indoor air or contain airborne substances called allergens. These conditions can set off asthma and other allergic reactions in people if you're sensitive to them. They also can cause "sick building syndrome." People with this condition are usually only affected when they are in the "sick" building.

If you cough and sneeze a lot — and you don't have a cold or other illness — it may be a sign that your home is making you sick. Another sign is whether symptoms tend to subside when away from home. Other symptoms include:

- Dark circles under the eyes
- Headache
- Eye, nose and throat irritation
- Tiredness

### What contributes to a sick home?

Homes with high indoor humidity levels have higher levels of two common allergens: dust mites and mold. Dampness and mold lurk in 20 to 50 percent of modern homes. Cockroaches, pet dander and chemicals from building and furnishing materials are other culprits.

Some allergens are visible to the eye, such as water-damaged walls and furniture. But, in some cases, the problem substances are invisible. These include:

- Airborne lead
- Fumes from fireplaces and gas or kerosene stoves

- Radon
- Tobacco smoke
- Pollen
- Chemicals released from some cleaning supplies and from new carpet, draperies and upholstered furniture.

### How to keep your home "healthy"

- Vacuum carpets and clean floors once a week.
- Wash clothes, bedding and curtains in hot water to kill dust mites.
- Put teddy bears and other soft toys in the freezer for 24 hours to destroy mites on a regular basis.
- Regularly clean bathroom and kitchen surfaces with bleach to reduce mold.
- Use allergen-proof covers on pillows, mattresses and comforters.
- Consider using a dehumidifier when the humidity is high.
- To discourage roaches, wash dishes and clean up crumbs and spills immediately.
- Keep your heating, ventilation and air-conditioning system clean and in working order.
- Consider investing in an air cleaner and/or vacuum cleaner with a HEPA air filter. Some evidence suggests these may reduce dust, mold and pet dander.
- Keep pets out of bedrooms



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## Health or wellness or prevention information

If you have questions about this program, have received this information in error, would prefer not to receive further information or want to inquire about resources for members with special needs, please call:

**1-800-392-4247 | 1-800-257-9980 (TTY)**

8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

For Customer Service, please call the number listed on the back of your ID card.

### ➤ HEALTHY LIVING AND GOOD EATING

## Fish Fillets en Papillote

Servings: 2

*Studies suggest that vitamin D may significantly reduce asthma symptoms. Spinach and fatty fish are both good sources of vitamin D.*

- 2 sheets of parchment cooking paper
- ½ to ¾ pound flounder fillets
- One small new potato, washed and thinly sliced
- 4 tablespoons mango chutney
- 1½ cups fresh spinach, shredded



Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Divide ingredients into equal portions. Place potato slices in cooking bags or on paper. Sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Top with fish. Spread mango chutney on fish, then add spinach.

Close cooking packets tightly by crimping edges. Place on baking sheet and bake for 25 minutes on lowest oven rack.

Remove from heat and let sit for two or three minutes before cutting into packet.

**Nutritional information per serving:** 224 calories; 3 g fat; 28 g carbohydrates; 20 g protein; 64 mg cholesterol; 533 mg sodium; 2 g fiber.