

Healthy Steps to

Managing Asthma

From your friends at Blue Care Network

When it's hard to breathe

Asthma

More than 20 million Americans have asthma, a chronic inflammatory lung disease. If other people in your family have asthma, you are more likely to develop it. Research suggests that being exposed to tobacco smoke, infections and some allergens early in your life may increase your chances of developing asthma.

There is no known cure for asthma, but it can be managed. You and your physician can work to make sure your asthma is under control.

Treatment focuses on:

- Rescue, usually by means of a device called an inhaler when symptoms are severe enough to cause trouble breathing
- Prevention of symptoms, by a combination of managing triggers (eliminating dust, for example) and medications

Allergies

More than 70 percent of people with asthma have allergies, which are exaggerated reactions of the immune system to certain substances. Indeed, allergies are significant triggers for asthma symptoms. The most common allergens are dust mites, cockroaches, mold and pollen.

Allergies also don't have a cure, but they can be controlled effectively with good prevention, awareness of triggers and knowing how to manage symptoms if they happen. Evaluation by an allergy/asthma specialist can be beneficial.

Asthma and children

Asthma is the most common pediatric chronic illness in the United States, accounting for 14 million absences from school each year. It is one of the top 10 reasons for hospitalizations.

Some children's asthma improves during the teenage years, while others have symptoms that become more severe over time. Many children who have asthma at a young age appear to "outgrow" it, although the asthma symptoms may reappear later in life.

Treat to compete

Just because you have asthma doesn't mean exercise and sports can't be a part of your life. The key is good asthma management.

Talk with your doctor about exercising with asthma. Find out if using your prescription prior to physical activity will benefit you. Also follow these tips:

- Always carry your emergency medication.
- Avoid outdoor exercise in cold, windy weather or when pollen counts are high.
- Keep away from fields of grass and weeds.
- Try to avoid car exhaust or factory pollutants.

Sports that involve short, intermittent periods of exertion such as volleyball, gymnastics, baseball and wrestling are good choices for people with asthma. So is swimming because it's usually performed in a warm, moist air environment that's good for breathing. Other activities include both outdoor and indoor biking and walking or running on a treadmill.

Whatever you choose, be sure to monitor your activity and watch for warning signs such as coughing, wheezing, difficulty breathing and tightness of the chest.

It's a fact...

Asthma Myths

Test your Asthma IQ by taking the following True/False quiz:

1. Asthma is "all in the mind." T F
2. Asthma can be cured, so it is not serious and nobody dies from it. T F
3. You are likely to develop asthma if someone in your family has it. T F
4. Asthma does not require medical treatment. T F

Resources

BCN's asthma program

This program helps you better understand asthma, how it affects your life and how you can better manage your condition.

For more information and to see if you're eligible for the asthma program, call BCN's Disease Management department at 800-392-4247. Registered nurses are available from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday (except holidays).

Resources

When you need special equipment

You may need special equipment to help manage your condition. Together with your primary care physician, you'll determine the type of equipment that may help you. These include:

- **Inhaler.** This handheld device delivers medicine directly into your lungs.
- **Spacer.** This separate tube used with your inhaler keeps medicine from escaping into the air. Releasing your medication into the spacer also gives you time to inhale more slowly and breathe in your full dose of medicine.
- **Nebulizer.** This larger version of an inhaler turns liquid asthma medicine into a fine mist that's breathed through a mask or mouthpiece. Nebulizers are usually used by people who can't use an inhaler.
- **Peak flow meter.** This handheld device measures daily variations in your breathing. The higher the number, the healthier you are. Your doctor can tell whether your asthma medication is working based on the readings of the meter.

Your doctor will write a prescription for the durable medical equipment you need.

Resources

BCN partners with Northwood Inc. to provide asthma equipment

To locate a Northwood provider near you, call the Customer Service number on the back of your ID card. You can find Northwood providers on our Web site at MiBCN.com/dme.

Diagnostic information

Asthma triggers

A trigger is anything that causes a person to experience asthma symptoms.

Common triggers include:

- Allergens, such as dust mites, cockroaches, mold and pollen
- Cold weather
- Exercise
- Airborne irritants such as chemical fumes, tobacco and wood stove smoke
- Respiratory infections
- Emotions, such as laughing, crying and stress

1. FALSE: Asthma is not a psychological condition. However, emotional triggers can cause flare-ups.
2. FALSE: There is no cure for asthma, but the disease can be controlled in most patients with good medical care. The condition should be taken seriously since uncontrolled asthma may result in emergency hospitalization and possibly death.
3. TRUE: You have a 30 percent chance of having asthma if one parent has it, and a 70 percent chance if both parents have it.
4. FALSE: Asthma is best controlled by following an asthma management plan designed by your doctor that includes the medications used for quick relief and those used as controllers.