

Health Education Fact Sheet

From Nurses for You

*Nursing Best
Practice Guideline*

The Goal is Asthma Control

Did you know that asthma is one of the most common chronic conditions, affecting 2.3 million Canadians over the age of four?

Although most people with asthma can gain good asthma control, many do not. In fact, 6 in 10 people with asthma have poor asthma control, and as a result restrict their everyday activities and suffer needlessly. The goal of asthma care is to provide you with freedom from symptoms and a normal, active lifestyle.

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory condition of the airways – common symptoms include shortness of breath, chest tightness, wheezing and/or coughing. Asthma attacks may begin suddenly, or symptoms may slowly get worse over a period of time.

What causes asthma?

The exact cause of asthma is not known. However, there are several factors that may play a part in the development of asthma. These include a tendency to have allergic reactions to things in your environment, a family history of asthma or allergies, and exposure to second hand smoke. Things that can trigger an asthma attack include irritants such as tobacco smoke, pollution, and exercise. Allergies to substances such as pollen, moulds, dust mites, pet dander and certain foods can trigger an attack, as can viral infections, colds, and certain drugs.

Assessing asthma control: You can expect your nurse or other healthcare provider to ask you some basic questions, such as: *“Have you ever been told by a doctor that you have asthma?”* or *“Have you ever used a puffer/inhaler or asthma medication for breathing problems?”*. Your level of asthma control should be assessed if you have been identified as having asthma (or are suspected of having asthma). Good asthma control is achieved when:



- you are using your “short-acting” puffer less than 4 times per week (unless for exercise);
- you are having daytime asthma symptoms less than four times per week;
- you are having night time asthma symptoms less than once per week;
- you have normal physical activity levels;
- you have no absence from work or school related to your asthma; and
- asthma attacks are infrequent and mild.

Asthma medications: You should anticipate that your nurse or other healthcare provider will discuss your asthma medications with you to make sure that you understand their purpose and use. You should also expect that you will be asked to demonstrate your puffer/inhaler technique to make sure that you are using your delivery device properly. If you need help in using your puffer/inhaler, ask your nurse for assistance.

Your Asthma Action Plan: If you have asthma, you should have a personal asthma action plan written by you and your asthma care providers. This plan will help you to monitor your asthma control and make changes to how you manage your asthma. Often asthma action plans use the image of a traffic light – a green, a yellow, and a red zone. The green zone describes good asthma control, and a “go ahead” with current therapy. The yellow zone describes a decrease in asthma control. In response to this loss of control, suggestions may be made to adjust medications and/or seek medical assistance. The red zone describes asthma that is out of control and severe enough to need urgent medical care.

Regular follow-up care: A key part of your asthma care includes follow-up visits with a healthcare provider who monitors your asthma. Your doctor may refer you to an asthma specialist if your diagnosis is in doubt, or if your asthma is out of control. There are also community resources for individuals with asthma that provide education and information that may be helpful for you in managing your asthma. Ask your nurse or other healthcare provider about services in your community.



This information fact sheet is developed as a supplement to the RNAO Nursing Best Practice Guideline document for nurses. Its intent is to increase your knowledge and involvement in making decisions about your health. The nursing best practice guideline, *Adult Asthma Care Guidelines for Nurses – Promoting Control of Asthma*, is available for public viewing and free download at www.rnao.org/bestpractices.



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