

Helping you control your asthma

A fact sheet for adults living with asthma

Many people with asthma restrict their daily activities and suffer needlessly. But with proper asthma care, you can reach asthma control.

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic swelling of your airways. Asthma symptoms may begin suddenly or may get worse over time. Some common symptoms are:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Wheeze
- Cough



What causes asthma?

We don't know the exact cause of asthma, but there are several things that may play a role in the development of asthma. These include:

- Family history of asthma or allergies (such as eczema or food allergies)
- Tendency to have allergic reactions to things in the environment (i.e., allergic rhinitis)
- Exposure to tobacco smoke or outdoor air pollution
- Workplace exposures

Triggers

For people with asthma, symptoms may be triggered by:

- Irritants such as tobacco smoke, changes in weather, pollution and exercise
- Allergens such as pollen, dust mites, and pet dander
- Infections and colds

What to expect from your health-care team

Your level of asthma control should be assessed. Asthma is under control when:

- You use your "fast acting" or reliever puffer < 4 times/week (including for exercise)
- You have daytime symptoms < 4 days/week
- You have nighttime symptoms < 1 night/week
- You have normal physical activity levels
- You are not absent from work or school due to asthma
- Asthma exacerbations (worsening of asthma symptoms) are infrequent and mild

Asthma education: You should be given information on how to manage your asthma by your health-care provider. This information includes:

- What is asthma?
- The difference between controlled asthma and uncontrolled asthma
- Information on your asthma medications and how to use your asthma puffer/inhaler
- Trigger identification and self-management strategies
- How to monitor your asthma symptoms
- How to use your asthma action plan
- Smoking cessation, if applicable

Asthma medications: Your health-care provider will discuss your asthma medications with you to make sure you understand what they are for, how to use them, and their side effects. You will be asked to demonstrate how you use your puffer/inhaler to make sure you are using them properly. Ask your health-care provider if you need any help using your inhaler/puffer.



Asthma action plan: If you have asthma, you and your health-care provider should make a written asthma action plan together. This plan will help you monitor your asthma control and make changes to how you manage your asthma. Asthma action plans often use traffic light zones (a green zone, a yellow and a red zone):

- The green zone is for stable asthma control, and a “go ahead” with current therapy.
- The yellow zone is for a time of “caution” because there are signs of your asthma getting worse and you are losing asthma control. There may be suggestions to adjust medications and/or seek medical attention.
- The red zone is for a time of “danger” where your asthma is out of control and severe enough to need urgent medical attention.

Regular follow-up with a health-care provider who monitors your asthma is an important part of your asthma care. Your health-care provider may refer you to an asthma specialist if your diagnosis is in doubt, or if your asthma is out of control.

This information fact sheet is developed as a supplement to the RNAO's Best Practice Guideline (BPG) document. It is designed to help you make decisions about your health. The BPG, *Adult Asthma Care: Promoting Control of Asthma, Second Edition*, is available for public viewing and free download at www.rnao.org/bestpractices.