

# Asthma



## What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a lifelong lung disease that causes your airways to narrow, swell and produce extra mucus, affecting how you breathe. Not everyone with asthma experiences the same symptoms, but symptoms can include coughing, wheezing, trouble breathing, tiredness and chest tightness.



People with asthma can live active, healthy lives – talk to your health care provider about symptoms, lung tests, medicines and when to seek help (for example, when you experience new or worsening symptoms, or when medicine does not seem to work).

## Controlling Asthma

Create a written **asthma action plan** with your provider, follow it, and share copies with family and caregivers. The plan helps you know:



- How well-controlled your asthma is
- Which asthma medicines to take, how much to take and when to take them
- How well you are breathing based on your **peak flow meter reading** – your provider will give you this test
- When to call your provider or go to the emergency room

A child with asthma should have a signed **medication administration form** on file at school so a school nurse can give medicine as directed by the child's provider.

## Asthma Triggers

Common asthma triggers – things that can cause symptoms – include weather changes; mold, dust, pet dander, pollen and air pollution; pests; chemicals and sprays with strong smells; tobacco smoke; respiratory infections; food allergies; and physical activity. Each person has their own types of triggers.

To avoid triggers:



Wash hands often with soap and water to prevent colds and flu.



Quit smoking and do not allow smoking in your home or car. For support to quit, call 866-NY-QUITS (866-697-8487).



Limit time outside and heavy exercise on extremely hot or cold days, or when air pollution levels or pollen counts are high.



Keep your home clean and dry: Keep food covered, get rid of clutter, and take out garbage and recycling every day.



Keep windows closed during pollen seasons: Use air conditioning on recirculation mode if possible.



Report pests, mold, water leaks, cracks and holes in your home to building staff. If not fixed, call **311**.



Avoid using chemicals and sprays with strong smells.



Bathe pets regularly and do not allow them on furniture or in rooms where you sleep.

## Asthma Medicines

There are two main types of asthma medicines:

- 1 Preventive or long-term control medicines** (such as Advair) **help prevent asthma symptoms and attacks** by slowly decreasing airway swelling. Take control medicine every day as directed by your provider, even if you are feeling well. To reduce the chance of an acute asthma attack becoming a serious one, talk to your provider about using a control medicine along with a quick-relief medicine.
- 2 Quick-relief medicines** (such as ProAir) **help stop asthma attacks** that have already started by relaxing and opening airways. Quick-relief medicines **do not** provide lasting relief or prevent asthma symptoms – however, if used 15 to 20 minutes before exercise, they can prevent exercise-induced asthma symptoms.

## Asthma Emergencies

In an asthma emergency, symptoms can include trouble breathing; heavy wheezing or coughing; chest tightness; dizziness; trouble talking, walking or moving; or blue lips or nails.

### If taking quick-relief medicine does not help:

- 1** Immediately call **911** and try to stay calm.
- 2** Continue to take quick-relief medicine as directed by your asthma action plan as you wait for help to arrive.

## Resources

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**Learn More** Visit [nyc.gov/health/asthma](https://nyc.gov/health/asthma).

**Find Care** For asthma counselors for children ages 17 and younger who live in East and Central Harlem, contact the **East Harlem Asthma Center of Excellence** at 646-682-2100 or [ehace@health.nyc.gov](mailto:ehace@health.nyc.gov).

**Receive the Latest Health Bulletins** Email [healthbulletins@health.nyc.gov](mailto:healthbulletins@health.nyc.gov).



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