



## Do These Things to Help Yourself and Others Breathe Easier

Know someone with asthma? You probably do. More than 25 million people, including 7 million children, in the U.S. have the lung condition. People of all ages have it, although it often starts in childhood.

Asthma inflames and narrows the windpipes, which causes coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and chest tightness. Some people with asthma may have symptoms every day, while others may only have issues when they are exposed to triggers, during different seasons or with activities such as exercise.

There are two main types of triggers that can bring on an asthma attack: allergens and irritants. Irritants are things like cigarette or wood smoke that irritate the nose, throat and lungs. Allergens differ depending on the person. One person with asthma may be allergic to something another person isn't.

Asthma and allergies often go hand in hand because allergens can bring on an asthma attack. Allergens include things like pollen, plants and animal dander.

Asthma can be life-threatening, and there is no cure. But it can be managed. If you have a friend or family member with asthma, you can help. People with asthma and those who care about them need to know what to do when asthma flairs up.

### What You Can Do to Get Ready for a Visit

Knowing how to help others avoid asthma triggers that make it hard for them to breathe can be good for you, too. And being unable to help a friend or family member during an attack is frightening.

It's hard to avoid all irritants and allergens. But if you're playing host to someone with breathing problems, you can make small changes to help them breathe easier in your home:

- Don't smoke, or make sure your guest won't have to spend time in areas where people are smoking.

- Vacuum and dust. Wash fabrics to get rid of dust mites. And be aware that things that are often unseen in your home, like cockroaches and mold, may cause issues for people with allergies and asthma.

- Don't clean with products that have heavy fumes right before your guests are coming over. Bleach and ammonia can be big triggers.

- Don't use aerosol sprays, like air fresheners and hair spray, just before they come in your home.

Don't splash on too much perfume or cologne.

Don't burn candles or incense when they are in your home.

Skip lighting the fireplace. Smoke can be a trigger. Even the smoke from an outdoor fire can be a problem.

Don't plan outdoor events during peak allergy season or times of heavy air pollution. Some people have worse symptoms when the air pollution is bad or in certain weather conditions.

If you have house pets, let your guests know so they can decide if they want to meet at your home or someplace else. Even if you keep your pets away, pet dander on your furniture and floors may cause a reaction.

## How You Can Help During an Asthma Flare-up

If your guest has a flare-up, stay calm. You may be able to help:

- Try to help the person relax.

- Help them get away from triggers if possible, such as leaving a smoky area.

- If they can talk, ask about their [asthma action plan](#), and see if you can help them follow it.

- See if they have an inhaler. If so, get it and help them use it.

You should call 911 if:

- You've tried the steps above but nothing seems to help

- They don't have an inhaler with them

- They can't talk

- Trouble breathing gets worse

- They have blue lips

- They pass out



### Be informed.

Asthma attacks are scary for everyone involved and can be life-threatening. Whether the person with asthma is you, a friend or a family member, it's important to learn what triggers flare-ups, how to prevent them and what to do if there is a problem.

## Make a plan to manage your asthma.

If you have asthma, you can help yourself by actively managing your condition. Work with your doctor to create a care plan called an [asthma action plan](#). And make sure you're doing all you can to manage your condition.

**If you have medicines, take them correctly.** It's critical to take the right medications at the right time and get refills as needed. Know which meds are given for acute episodes and which ones you need to take regularly. Talk to your doctor if you're having to use an inhaler more often than recommended. Overuse of inhalers may indicate that your asthma is not well controlled and can cause health problems.

**If you have an inhaler, use it correctly.** The American Lung Association offers [tips and videos](#) for correct use and maintenance of different types of equipment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers [step-by-step videos](#) and fact sheets on how to correctly use a metered dose inhaler, both [with a spacer](#) and [without a spacer](#). You can also ask your health care provider to check your technique.

**Track your health.** Keep track of:

- When you take your meds and when you use your inhaler

- Peak flow, or how fast you can breathe out, measured with a peak flow meter

- Forced expiratory volume, or how much air you can breathe out during a forced breath

- Your medication dose and how well it's working

- How well your asthma is under control

This information helps your doctor and pharmacist help you.

**What to watch for.** Talk with your doctor when:

- Your symptoms get worse or happen more often

- Your asthma wakes you up

Your peak flow numbers are lower or change a lot  
Your meds don't seem to be working as well as they used to  
There are signs of chronic cough and airway inflammation

Sources: [Asthma](#), American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI); [Asthma Action Plan](#), AAAAI; [Know how to use your asthma inhaler](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; [Asthma Patient Resources and Videos](#), American Lung Association, 2018, [What Should I Do if My Friend is Having an Asthma Flare-up?](#), TeensHealth, 2017; [Asthma](#), National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute; [Asthma Prevention](#), WebMD, 2018; [Long-Term Effects of Overuse of an Inhaler for Asthma](#), Livestrong.com