

Take Charge of Your Asthma

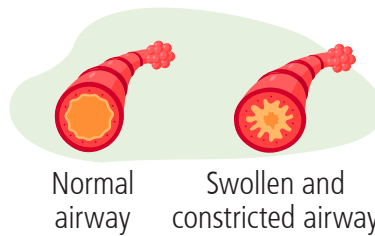


What Is Asthma?

A condition that affects the airways into your lungs. Asthma can make it hard for you to breathe. It can also make you cough a lot.

With asthma, your airways:

- Tighten and thicken
- Make extra mucus
- Become irritated and swollen
- Stay sensitive to irritation and triggers



Some people with asthma only have symptoms once in a while. Others have symptoms every day. Some people are worse at certain times of the year. While asthma can't be cured, you can work with your Primary Care Provider* (PCP) to control your asthma.

*Your Primary Care Provider is the doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner in charge of your health care.



Controlling your asthma means:

- You can play and exercise without problems
- You can sleep well through the night
- You don't miss school days or work because of asthma
- No emergency room visits or hospital stays because of asthma attacks
- Few or no side effects from medicine

What Does Asthma Feel Like?

Asthma is not the same for everyone. You may have some or all of these symptoms with your asthma:

- **Cough:** You may cough a lot, even when you don't have a cold. The cough may last a long time. It may wake you up at night or early in the morning. You may cough when you play or exercise.
- **Wheezing:** Wheezing is a whistling sound when you breathe. This is air trying to go through narrow airways. Wheezing happens when the airway muscles tighten and thicken.
- **Shortness of breath:** You may have trouble breathing or feel like you can't get enough air. You may need to breathe faster than normal.
- **Chest tightness:** When your chest feels tight or heavy. Your chest may hurt or feel like something is squeezing or pressing on it. You may feel like it is hard to get air in and out of your lungs.
- **Fatigue/tiredness:** You may get tired more easily than usual.



Know your symptoms so you can act quickly when they start or when they get worse. Make an action plan with your PCP. Acting early can keep symptoms from getting worse, so you will still be able to go to school, work, and stay out of the hospital. On follow-up visits, your PCP will check your asthma control. Take the **Asthma Control Test™** to figure out how in control your symptoms are.

About Asthma Attacks

An asthma attack is when your asthma symptoms get out of control and make you sick.

Talk to your PCP about creating an Asthma Action Plan. See pg. 8 for more details.

Early signs of an asthma attack:

- An increase in cough, mucus, wheezing, chest tightness, and feeling out of breath
- Waking up more often because of cough or trouble breathing
- Not being able to do your normal activities
- Using more of your rescue medicine than what is normal for you
- Not getting as much relief from your rescue medicine. If this happens, call your PCP right away. Waiting too long can lead to an asthma attack that is serious or life threatening.



Signs of a serious asthma attack:

- Cough, wheezing, or chest tightness that is worse than normal
- Lips or fingernails may turn blue
- Breathing hard and fast
- May not be able to walk or talk well
- Ribs may show more than normal when you are breathing in. **When this happens, call 911 or go to an emergency room right away.**

What Is a Trigger?

An asthma trigger is something that makes your asthma symptoms start up or get worse. Different people have different triggers. Put an next to each of the triggers below that you think make your asthma worse. Your PCP may test you for some allergic triggers, like dust, pollen, mold, and pet dander.



Indoor (At Home, Work, or School)

- Smoke from cigarettes, marijuana, vape pens, pipes, cigars, or a fireplace
- Strong smells (like cleaning products or perfumes)
- Dust or dust mites
- Mold
- Cats, dogs, or other animals
- Rats, mice, or cockroaches

Outdoor

- Cold or very hot weather
- Air pollution or smog
- Changes in weather or seasons
- Pollen
- Plants, flowers, grass, or trees

Other Triggers

- Stress or worry
- Colds or other sickness
- Exercise or play
- Certain medicines
- Food allergies

Use the Symptom Diary on pg. 3 to keep track of your triggers.

Learn what triggers your asthma. Try to avoid your triggers. If you feel your asthma getting worse, try to recall what triggers you may have been around. Keeping a symptom diary can help you learn your patterns and what triggers your asthma. Sometimes, triggers change over time. Keeping a symptom diary can help you figure out if your triggers change. Also, plan ahead: take your rescue medicine ahead as directed by your PCP if you know you will be around triggers. Remember to bring it with you.

Record Your Symptoms

Write down your asthma symptoms on the chart below or on a separate chart. Identify your asthma triggers and see how well your treatments are controlling your asthma.

Symptom Diary Chart

Date	Symptom	What was the trigger?

Your Asthma Is Well Controlled If:

- You can do all of your **normal activities**
- You have **symptoms** no more than 2 days a week, and these symptoms don't wake you up at night
- You take **quick-relief (rescue) medicines** for relief of asthma symptoms no more than 2 days a week. This does not include using your rescue medicine to prevent asthma triggered by exercise.
- Your **peak flow** doesn't drop below 80% of your personal best number. Learn more about peak flow on pg. 5.



Dealing with Triggers

Try some of the tips below to avoid triggers.

Cut Odors

- If you smoke, make a plan to **smoke less or quit**. Talk to your PCP about free nicotine patches and counseling. Call Kick It California at **1(800) 300-8086** to get help quitting.
- **If you smoke, do it outside**. Wash your hands and face when going home. Smoke in the home or car can trigger asthma.
- Try to **limit being near people who are smoking**.
- **Avoid using strongly scented products**, such as home deodorizers, incense, perfumed laundry products, and personal care products.
- **Stay away from bleach, ammonia, and other strong disinfectants**. Safer cleaning options: plain soap, lemon juice, baking soda, or vinegar diluted with water.



Be Aware of Outdoor Triggers

- **Stay indoors** when a lot of pollen or mold may be outside.
- **Keep windows closed** and try not to use fans during pollen season.
- **Check the air quality** on your weather app or online. Don't exercise when air quality is bad. Visit sparetheair.com for alerts.
- **On very bad pollution days**, stay indoors with windows closed.
- **If cold air triggers you**, try breathing through your nose. Cover up with a scarf.

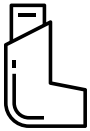
Get Rid of Dust and Mold

- **Clean mold off hard surfaces** with soap and hot water. Scrub with stiff brush, and then rinse clean with water. Couches and curtains with mold may need to be replaced.
- **Mop and vacuum weekly**. Make sure your vacuum has a good filter.
- When showering or cooking, **use fans or open windows to prevent mold growth**.
- **Cover mattresses and pillows** in dust mite-proof zippered covers.
- **Wash bedding and stuffed toys** in hot water every 1–2 weeks. Freeze stuffed toys that aren't washable for 24 hours. Remove stuffed animals around the bed.
- **Remove carpet** if you can.
- Ask for the **heating system filters** in your building to be replaced regularly.

Avoid Pests and Animals

- **Do not leave food or garbage out**. Store food in airtight containers.
- Try using **traps and poison baits**, such as boric acid for cockroaches. Instead of sprays/bombs, use baits placed away from children, such as behind refrigerator.
- Vacuum up cockroach bodies and **fill holes in** with caulking or copper wool.
- If possible, **fix leaky plumbing**, roof, and other sources of water that can attract pests.
- **Think about not having pets**. Try not to have pets with fur or feathers.
- **Keep pets out of the bedroom** of the person with asthma.
- Always **wash your hands** after petting animals.

Medicine Is the Key for Asthma Control



Most asthma medicines come in the form of an inhaler. There are two kinds of medicine to treat asthma: **controllers** and **relievers**.

- **Long-term or Controller Medicine** is taken each day to prevent symptoms. It reduces irritation, swelling, and phlegm that close the airways. This medicine is the main way to control asthma and prevent flare-ups. Use it each day even when you don't have symptoms. You will see the benefits if you keep using it. It may also be used as a rescue medicine under your PCP's instruction.
- **Rescue Medicine** is used for flare-up or attack symptoms. Over time, it works to relax tight muscles around the airways. Use your rescue medicine for quick, temporary relief of asthma symptoms. Quick rescue medicine may work for 4-12 hours based on the medicine. Your PCP may also have you take this before you exercise to prevent asthma symptoms. If your asthma is well-controlled, you shouldn't take rescue medicine more than 2 times per week to treat asthma symptoms. Talk with your PCP about what types of rescue medicine you can use.

Asthma Medicine Tips

Talk to your PCP if you have any questions about the following:

- **Take your asthma medicines** as prescribed by your PCP.
- Make sure you are **using your inhalers** the right way.
- Most inhalers should be used with a **spacer**. Spacers make inhalers easier to use and more effective.
- For some medicines (inhaled steroids), you need to **rinse your mouth** and spit out after each use.
- You may need to **take allergy medicine** to help prevent your asthma from flaring up.

Use the **medicine chart** on pg. 10 to keep track of your asthma medicine.

Write down your asthma medicines to track why and when you use your medicine. You can also ask your PCP to print out a list of your medicines with instructions. This is also a part of the medicine chart on pg. 10.

Know Your Peak Flow



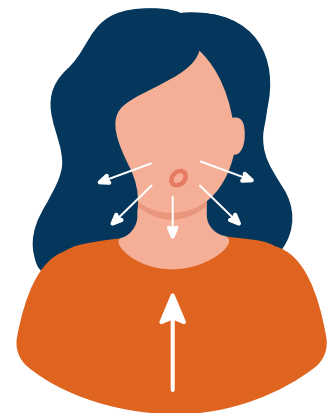
Some asthma patients may do better by tracking their asthma with a **peak flow meter**. A peak flow meter is a small plastic tool that measures how well air moves out of the lungs. High numbers (80% of your personal best) mean better airflow. Lower numbers (less than 50–79% of your personal best) mean your asthma is getting worse. Your PCP may prescribe a peak flow meter if it will help you better track your asthma.

Ask your PCP to help you practice your peak flow measurement:

1. Stand up straight.
2. Put the marker at the bottom of the numbered scale.
3. Take your deepest breath in.
4. Place the mouthpiece in your mouth and close your lips tightly around it. Do not put your tongue inside the hole. Do not cover the hole on the back of the peak flow meter when holding it.
5. Blow out as hard and as fast as you can, in one quick blow.
6. Repeats steps 1 through 5 three more times. Write down the highest (best) number.
7. Ask your PCP how often you should measure and record your peak flow. Close monitoring of your peak flow for one to two weeks can help you figure out your "personal best."

At home, check your peak flow to see how you are doing. When your asthma acts up, your peak flow may be lower. This is a sign for you to take action, and call your PCP.

If you are doing well, personal best peak flow numbers show you and your PCP that your medicines are working.



Mental Health: Taking Care of Your Emotions

Taking care of your emotional health is just as important as taking care of your physical health. Often it can be helpful to talk with a counselor about emotional ups and downs in your life, especially if they start to get worse and take a toll on you.

Each person's asthma experience is unique, but there are some feelings that many people with asthma may experience:



Fear and worry

about the future,
about your health

Loss of control

"I'll never get a handle on this"

Denial

"This can't be happening to me,
I'm not sick"

Anger

"It's not fair, my body
is turning against me"

Guilt

"I must have done something
to make this happen"

Shame

"What will others think?"



Free Resources for SFHP Members:

Specialists are available to help you manage these kinds of issues in your life. You can find free local services to help you get back on track and feel better.

Medi-Cal Members

Call Carelon Behavioral Health at **1(855) 371-8117**.

Healthy Workers HMO Members

Call San Francisco Behavioral Health Services (SFBHS) at **1(888) 246-3333**.

Mental Health: Taking Care of Your Emotions

Tips for Taking Care of Your Mental Health

- Remember to HALT – check if you are feeling Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired
- Identify your triggers so you know when to avoid or cope with them
- Try a day-to-day schedule to help manage your time
- Set out a time for yourself to enjoy something that feels good



Practice Relaxing Exercises

Try simple 5–10 minute deep breathing or meditation, such as:

- The 4 Box Breathing practice: inhale for 4 counts then exhale for 4 counts
- Repeat a phrase that makes your body feel calm, like “Relax and let go”
- Picture in your mind a person, place, or time that makes you feel at peace and happy
- Visit [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and search “mindfulness” for free exercises
- Download free mindfulness apps like Insight Timer for guided mental exercise
- Talk to friends, family, or a counselor

Tips for Caring for Your Body

- Ask your PCP for tips on exercising with asthma
- Try yoga, swimming, walking, or other activities you like
- Warm up before exercise and cool down afterwards
- You may have to take rescue medicine before starting a workout
- Wear a scarf over your face in cool weather to keep cold air out of lungs
- Eat lots of different vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and lean protein. Ask your PCP about what a healthy diet for you can look like.
- Sleep 7–9 hours each night
- Limit contact with people who are sick
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Get your COVID vaccine, boosters, yearly flu shot, and pneumonia vaccine



Partner with Your Care Team

You can take control of your asthma together.

- Find a PCP you feel comfortable with
- Keep your appointments so you can get the best care possible
- Create an Asthma Action Plan with your care team. See pg. 8 as a guide.
- Make sure to ask your health care team any and all questions you have about your asthma. If you do not understand the answer, it is okay to ask again. It’s very important to know how to take care of your asthma!

Make an Asthma Action Plan

This is a plan that you make with your PCP. It is split into green, yellow, and red zones. It will help you figure out what you need to do, based on how controlled your asthma is.

GREEN ZONE	YELLOW ZONE	RED ZONE
It reminds you to take your controller medicines every day, even when you are feeling well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It helps you to know what to do when you have asthma symptoms. • It helps you decide when to use your rescue medicines. • It helps you to know when you need to see your PCP. 	It can help you decide when to go to the ER or call 911 .

Your asthma action plan has all this information on one page. You can also give a copy to your school or workplace. Keep your asthma action plan up to date with all of your asthma and allergy medicines. Keep it where you can see it every day.

My Asthma Action Plan

Controller medicines	How much to take	How often	Other instructions
		_____ times per day EVERY DAY!	<input type="checkbox"/> Gargle or rinse mouth after use (steroid inhalers)
		_____ times per day EVERY DAY!	
		_____ times per day EVERY DAY!	
		_____ times per day EVERY DAY!	
Quick-relief medicines	How much to take	How often	Other instructions
<input type="checkbox"/> Albuterol (Pro-Air, Ventolin, Proventil) <input type="checkbox"/> Levalbuterol (Xopenex) <input type="checkbox"/> Budesonide/formoterol (Symbicort) <input type="checkbox"/> Mometasone/formoterol (Dulera)	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 puffs <input type="checkbox"/> 4 puffs <input type="checkbox"/> 1 nebulizer treatment	Take ONLY as needed (see next page – starting in Yellow Zone or before exercise)	NOTE: If you need this medication more than two days a week, call your PCP to consider increasing controller medications. Talk with them about your treatment plan.

My Asthma Action Plan

Special instructions when I am:



Doing well



Getting worse



Having a medical alert

DOING WELL – GREEN ZONE



- No cough, wheeze, chest tightness, or shortness of breath during the day or night.
- I can do usual activities.

Peak Flow (for ages 5 and up) is _____ or more. (80% or more of personal best)

Personal Best Peak Flow (for ages 5 and up): _____

PREVENT asthma symptoms every day:

- Take my controller medicines (on page 18) every day.
- Before exercise, take _____ puff(s) of _____.
- Avoid things that make my asthma worse (see pages 3-4).

GETTING WORSE – YELLOW ZONE



- Cough, wheeze, chest tightness, short of breath, or
- Waking at night due to asthma symptoms, or
- Can do some, but not all, usual activities.

Peak Flow (for ages 5 and up): _____ to _____. (50 to 79% of personal best)

CAUTION – Continue taking every day controller medicines, AND:

- Take _____ puffs of _____ nebulizer treatment of quick relief medicine. If I am not back in the Green Zone within 20–30 minutes take _____ more puffs or nebulizer treatments. If I am not back in the Green Zone within one hour, then I should:
 - Increase _____
 - Add _____
 - Call _____
- Continue using quick relief medicine every 4 hours as needed. Call PCP if not improving in _____ days.

MEDICAL ALERT – RED ZONE



- Very short of breath, or
- Quick-relief medicines have not helped, or
- Cannot do usual activities, or
- Symptoms are same or get worse after 24 hours in **Yellow Zone**.

Peak Flow (for ages 5 and up): less than _____. (50% of personal best)

MEDICAL ALERT! – Get Help!

- Take quick relief medicine: _____ puffs every _____ minutes and get help immediately.
- Take _____
- Call _____

DANGER! Get help immediately!

Call **911** if trouble walking or talking due to shortness of breath or if lips or fingernails are gray or blue. For children, call **911** if skin is sucked in around neck and ribs during breaths or child does not respond normally.

Medicine Chart

Name of asthma medication	Reason for taking	Dose (amount)	When to take (time of day or when you feel certain symptoms)	Dates used	Date refilled at pharmacy	Next time to refill	Peak flow measurement and date
Other medicines	Reason for taking	Dose (amount)	When to take	Dates used	Date refilled at pharmacy	Next time to refill	Side effects

Rate Your Health!

Life with Asthma Questions

Fill out the form below and bring it to your next appointment with your PCP.

Do you know what asthma is?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you know how to control or prevent asthma attacks?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you see a specialist for your asthma?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you take your medicines exactly as your PCP says to? If not, what gets in the way? Explain here:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you have family or friends that can help you manage your health?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you have any cultural or religious values that affect your care? Explain here:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
Do you have any problems with keeping your PCP visits? If yes, what gets in the way? Explain here:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
Would you like to go to classes to help you manage your asthma better?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Sometimes <input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know <input type="checkbox"/>	
There may be changes you could make in your life to improve your health. On a scale of 1-5, how ready are you to make changes? (1 is not even thinking about it, and 5 is already doing it)	1	2	3	4	5

How Are You Feeling?

Over the past two weeks, how often have you felt any of these feelings?	Not at all	Some days	More than half the days*	Nearly every day*
Little interest or pleasure in doing things	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*If you answered "More than half the days" or "Nearly every day" to either question, please call Carelon Behavioral Health at **1(855) 371-8117** right away. You can talk to someone about how you are feeling.

Questions to Ask Your PCP

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

Resources



Home Based Environmental Services for People with Asthma in San Francisco
Free home visits for people with asthma
sfdph.org/dph/eh/asthma



US Dept of Health and Human Services – Manage stress
health.gov/myhealthfinder/health-conditions/heart-health/manage-stress



Breathe California - Golden Gate – Free asthma education classes
ggbreathe.org



Bay Area Spare the Air Program – Check for air quality alerts
sparetheair.org



American Lung Association – Information about asthma
1(800) 586-4872 | lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/asthma



Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America – Information about asthma and allergies
1(800) 727-8462 | aafa.org



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Information about asthma
1(800) 232-4636 | cdc.gov/asthma



National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute – Information about asthma
nhlbi.nih.gov/health/asthma



San Francisco Health Plan Customer Service
1(415) 547-7800
Health and wellness information
sfhp.org/wellness

For more information call Customer Service at **1(415) 547-7800** or visit sfhp.org/health-ed
24/7 Nurse Advice Line **1(877) 977-3397** | Talk to a doctor 24/7 sfhp.org/teladoc