

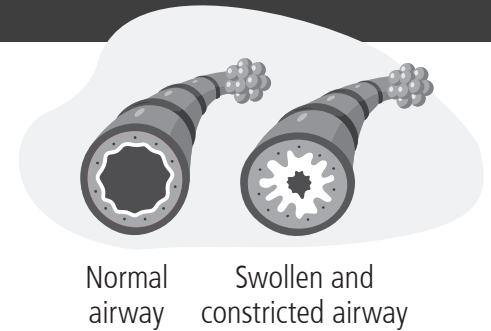
# Take Charge of Your Asthma

## 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.

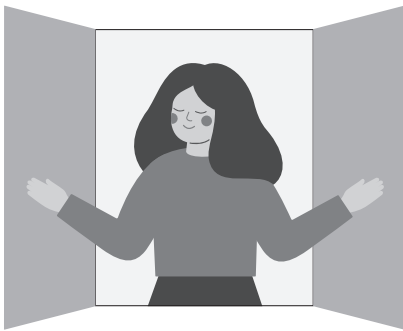
### With asthma, your airways:

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



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.

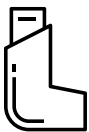
*\*Your Primary Care Provider is the doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner in charge of your health care.*



### 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

## 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 or twice a 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. 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.

### 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.

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.

## 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?"



### **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** and search "mindfulness" for free exercises
- Download free mindfulness apps like Insight Timer for guided mental exercise
- Talk to friends, family, or a counselor



# Mental Health: Taking Care of Your Emotions

## 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.
- 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!



## 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 Beacon Health Options at **1(855) 371-8117**.

### Healthy Workers HMO Members

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