



Help Your Child Gain Control Over

# Asthma



United States  
Environmental Protection  
Agency

Indoor Environments  
Division  
Office of Air and Radiation

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It's hard to see your child sick. The good news is that you can help your child gain control over asthma. That means fewer days out of school and fewer attacks that can be scary for you and your child.

Along with the doctor, you have an important role in helping your child control asthma. We congratulate you for reading this booklet.

"My daughter Carrie has asthma. Life is a lot easier since we put together an asthma action plan with her doctor. She's sick a lot less now.

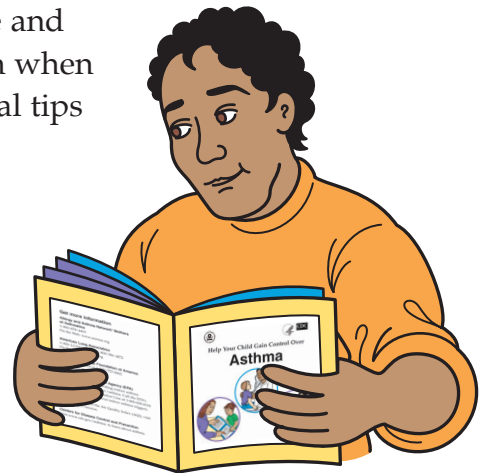
"Coming up with a plan that works and making sure medicines were taken on time and the right way really cut down on her sick days. Going through the house to get rid of the 'triggers'—those things that brought on Carrie's asthma—made a huge difference too."

**—Rita, mom of 7-year-old Carrie Lynn**

## To get the most from this booklet

You will want to read this booklet to learn more about helping your child prevent asthma attacks. The booklet is broken into two parts.

- Read **Part 1** for how to create a plan to take control of asthma.
- Read **Part 2** for ways to find and keep things away from your child that trigger—or bring on—your child’s asthma attacks.
- Share this booklet with friends, family, teachers, daycare staff, and your child’s doctor.
- Put this booklet in a handy place and pull it out to read now and again when you need it. We hope the practical tips listed will help your child have fewer problems with asthma.



**Read this booklet to learn about helping your child.**

# Part 1

## Create a plan to take control

### Learn about asthma

Page 4

Learn about asthma attacks, what causes an attack, and warning signs that show your child's asthma may be getting worse.

### Be aware of your child's warning signs

Page 6

Find out how to stop an attack before it gets worse.

### Make an asthma action plan

Page 11

Work with your child's doctor to design a daily plan and a rescue plan that work for your child.

## Learn about asthma

Learn about asthma and the early warning signs before asthma gets out of control. Work with your child's doctor. Come up with an asthma action plan that works for your child.

### **What is asthma?**

Asthma is a disease that causes the airways of the lungs to tighten and swell. It is common among children and teens.

### **What is an asthma attack?**

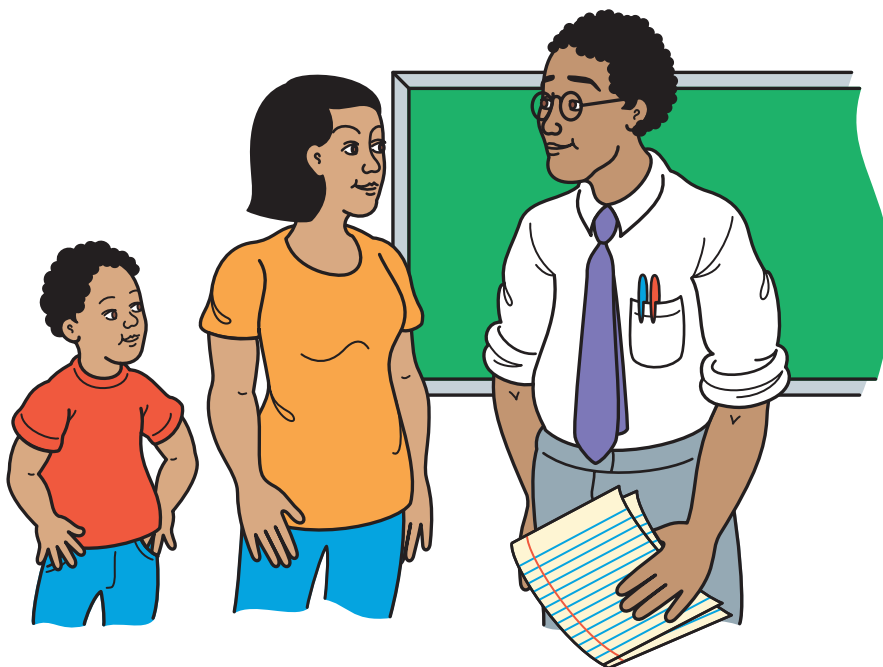
An asthma attack happens when your child has asthma and their lungs aren't getting enough air to breathe. Your child may cough or wheeze during an attack.

### **What causes an asthma attack?**

Things that cause asthma attacks are called triggers. Triggers are everywhere. Your child's home or school can be full of triggers such as pests and mold. Read [Part 2](#) on page 15 to learn more about triggers.

“I found it helpful to learn all I could about asthma. It made it easier to talk to my son’s teacher when I knew what to tell him to look for if Tyler has an asthma attack in school.”

—Mary, mom of 9-year-old Tyler



Tell the school if your child has asthma.

## Be aware of your child's warning signs

Often your child may show warning signs. Warning signs are clues that your child's asthma may be getting worse.

A very young child may not be able to tell you how he or she feels. So you may have to watch a younger child more closely to find out if something is wrong.

### **How will I know if asthma is getting worse?**

Learn your child's warning signs and catch an attack before it gets worse. While warning signs differ from child to child, parents report some common signs.

Think about the last time your child had an asthma attack. On the next page, check off the signs you noticed before the attack. Be sure to go over this checklist with your child's doctor.



## Asthma Warning Signs Checklist



### Warning signs you noticed

- Coughed at night
- Had a cold or the flu
- Had a fever
- Had a stuffy or runny nose
- Had a tickle in the throat
- Sneezed and had watery eyes

### How he or she looked or seemed to feel

- Acted very restless
- Face was pale
- Had dark circles under the eyes
- Had tightness in the chest
- Seemed to feel weak or tired
- Seemed to have a headache



**List other signs here that you have noticed:**

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## Emergency Warning Signs

There are times when you need to take your child to the hospital or urgent care right away.

Ask your child's doctor what emergency signs to look for to help you know when your child is having a medical emergency with asthma.

Some parents know their child is having a medical emergency with asthma if he or she:

- Is breathing in a different way: faster, or slower, or more shallow than usual.
- Is coughing or wheezing and can't stop.
- Has bluish fingernails or lips.



**Write your child's emergency signs here:**

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## **Read how some parents learned to look for warning signs**

“Both my kids have asthma and both have very different warning signs before a full-blown attack. My 5-year-old daughter Kim is about to go into asthma when she gets these very dark circles under her eyes. And she gets cranky and clingy.

“With 13-year old Clay, I watch for times he doesn’t feel like eating and he seems to be tired a lot—real low energy. As a teen, Clay doesn’t like to admit when his asthma is getting bad. I ask him to pull out the peak flow meter right away to check for low numbers.”

**—Rebecca, mom of 5-year-old Kim and 13-year-old Clay**

“When Jamie starts to cough at night, I know we’re headed for trouble.”

**—Carlos, dad of 7-year-old Jamie**

## How can I help my child have fewer asthma attacks?

- You've taken a great first step. You're reading this booklet. That's great!
- Become aware of your child's warning signs that asthma is getting worse. Learn the emergency warning signs of an asthma attack.
- Talk to your child's doctor and work on an asthma action plan . . . together!



Write down your child's warning signs.

## Make an asthma action plan

The action plan looks at what triggers or brings on your child's asthma. The plan also includes your child's **daily medicine** needs. And the plan lists **rescue medicines** for quick-relief during an attack or when asthma signs start.

Work with your child's doctor and come up with a written action plan for managing your child's asthma.

- Share the asthma action plan with your child's school, teachers, babysitters, and family members.
- Talk it over with people in your child's life. In case of an asthma attack they will know what to do.

While asthma action plans may differ from doctor to doctor, most plans will address two areas: a **daily program** and a **rescue program**.

Follow the action plan. It can help lower the number of asthma attacks. Talk to your child's doctor if you need to make changes in the plan.

**The action plan's **daily program** may list:**

- Your child's asthma triggers
- Daily medicines and how to use them
- Peak flow meter chart

**The action plan's **rescue program** may list:**

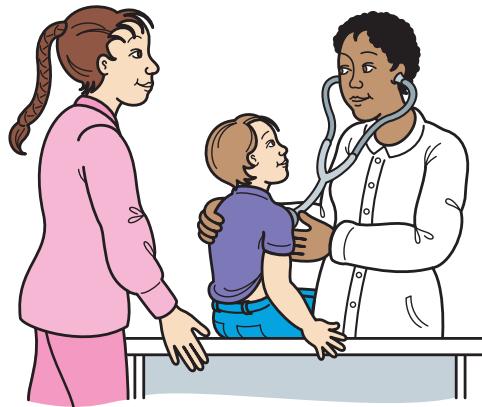
- Your child's warning signs
- Your child's peak flow meter readings
- Names of the rescue medicines used to treat asthma as an asthma attack gets worse
- Steps to take if your child has an asthma attack and when to call the doctor
- Emergency numbers and when to take your child to the emergency room

**Remember parents**—make sure you know the right amount of medicine your child needs to take each day. Talk to your child’s doctor if you have questions.

Does your child use an inhaler, a spacer or a peak flow meter? Ask the doctor to show you how to use these at home. Have your child practice a few times in front of the doctor.

“I found we needed to talk to the doctor about what was and wasn’t working with Garrett’s asthma action plan. By making a few changes we helped Garrett stop little problems before they became big health problems!”

—**Brenda, mom of 8-year-old Garrett**



Learn all you can about asthma.

# To review Part 1

- Read about asthma.
- Learn all you can about your child's warning signs.
- Ask questions. Work with your child's doctor to come up with an asthma action plan that works for your child and your family.
- Follow the action plan. Make sure all the people who care for your child know about the plan and how to follow it.



## Part 2

### Control your child's asthma triggers

#### Learn what may trigger your child's asthma

Page 17

Use these tips to help find out what may be making your child's asthma worse.

#### Take steps to control asthma

Page 19

Read the good news about what you can do to control your child's asthma.

#### Get rid of your child's asthma triggers

Page 20

Follow this guide to help you become aware of triggers inside and outside your home.

“I kept getting asthma attacks because of our cat Josie. We found a good home for Josie and I now have a goldfish. At first I was sad about losing my pet, but now I like not being sick with asthma all the time. And I use lots less medicine now that I have fish instead of a furry cat.”

—Liz, age 9



Fish are good pets for kids with asthma.

## Learn what may trigger your child's asthma

As we said in **Part 1**, triggers are the things that can start your child's asthma attack or make it worse. Your child may have just one trigger or you may find that several things act as triggers.

- For some kids, being around pets or dust can trigger asthma.
- Some kids find their asthma gets worse from cigarette smoke.
- For other kids, running and playing may bring on an asthma attack.

Be sure to work with the doctor to identify your child's asthma triggers.

Once you know what triggers your child's asthma, it is important to take steps to control these triggers. Remembering to smoke outside or keeping pests out of your home means taking action every day. The more these habits are part of your daily life, the less chance there is your child will have an asthma attack.

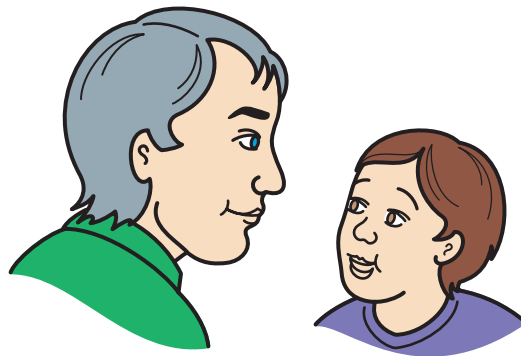
## Kids can learn to control their triggers

“We used to have cockroaches all over our kitchen counters. Now we put bread and crackers in plastic containers, and guess what? No more roaches. And that means I am having fewer asthma attacks.”

—Becky, age 12

“After I kept getting asthma both my mom and step-dad stopped smoking. No smoke means no bad attacks. And now I need a lot less medicine and that is a very good thing. Now my mom even makes sure my Aunt Kim smokes in the driveway—even in the winter.”

—Marcus, age 10



Older kids can often tell you what triggers their asthma.

## Take steps to control asthma

**First:** Think about when your child's asthma got worse. Was your child near someone who was smoking? Playing with a friend's dog? Outside when the air pollution level was high?

**Next:** Look at the triggers listed on pages 21 to 30. Circle the triggers you notice make your child's asthma worse.

**Finally:** Use the tips on the next several pages and work with your child's doctor to learn ways to:

- Keep your child away from triggers when possible.
- Remove the triggers from your home, school or daycare.



Circle the triggers that make your child's asthma worse.

## Get rid of your child's asthma triggers

When you remove triggers from your home or keep your child away from triggers outdoors, you help your child stay healthy and have fewer asthma attacks. Use pages 21 to 30 as a guide to find what may trigger your child's asthma and what you can do about it.

"I found it very helpful to read about asthma triggers. I was able to take the list to my child's doctor and we talked about what things trigger his asthma and how to remove them."

—Lia, mom of 9-year-old Jordan



Ask your doctor how to remove triggers from your home.

## Secondhand smoke

### **What It Is:**

Secondhand smoke is the smoke from a cigarette, cigar, or pipe, and the smoke exhaled by a smoker.

### **What You Can Do:**

- Don't let anyone smoke near your child.
- If you smoke—until you can quit, don't smoke in your home or car.

## Dust Mites

### What They Are:

Dust mites are tiny bugs that are too small to see.

### Where They Live:

Dust mites live in things like sheets, blankets, pillows, mattresses, soft furniture, carpets, and your child's stuffed toys.

### What You Can Do:

- Wash bedding once a week. Dry completely.
- Use dust proof covers on pillows and mattresses.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture every week.
- Choose stuffed toys that you can wash. Wash stuffed toys and dry completely before your child plays with the toy.



Wash stuffed toys and dry them completely to help control dust mites.



## Pets

### What Type:

Animals in your home, such as cats and dogs.

### What You Can Do:

- Find another home for your cat or dog.
- Keep pets outside if possible.
- If you have to have a pet inside, keep it out of your child's bedroom.
- Keep pets off of your furniture.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture when your child is not around.



**Vacuum every week to help control pet hair and dust.**

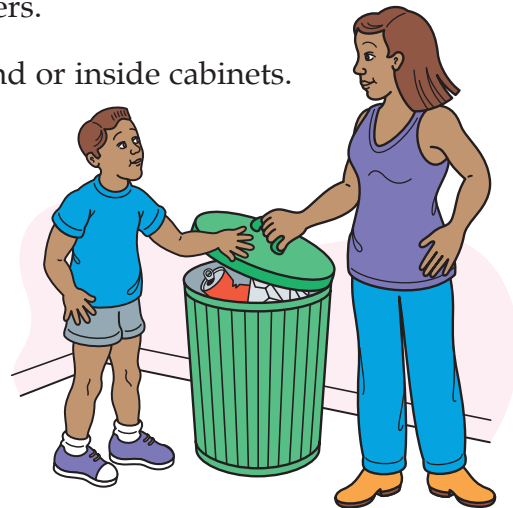
## Cockroaches ("roaches" or other "pests")

### Where To Look:

Areas with food and water such as your kitchen and bathroom. Areas where you store paper bags, cardboard boxes, or newspapers such as your basement.

### What You Can Do:

- Keep counters, sinks, tables, and floors clean and free of clutter. Clean dishes, crumbs, and spills right away.
- Store food in airtight containers.
- Seal cracks or openings around or inside cabinets.
- Use roach baits or traps instead of sprays.
- Cover trash cans.



Cover the trash to keep pests away.

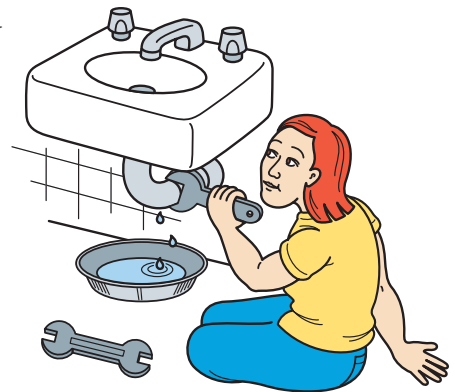
## Mold

### Where To Look:

Mold grows in damp places such as kitchens, bathrooms, and basements.

### What You Can Do:

- If you see mold on hard surfaces, clean it up with soap and water. Let the area dry completely.
- Use exhaust fans or open a window in the bathroom and kitchen when showering, cooking, or washing dishes.
- Fix water leaks as soon as possible to keep mold from growing.
- Dry damp or wet things completely within one to two days to keep mold from growing.



**Fix leaks as soon as possible to keep mold from growing.**

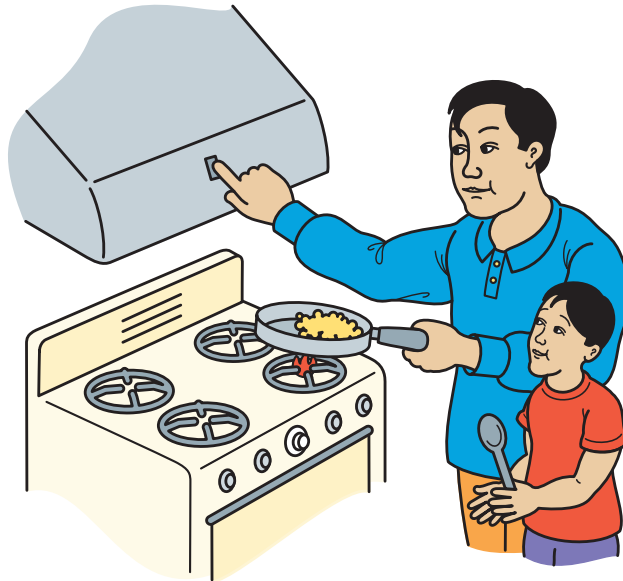
## Nitrogen Dioxide

### What It Is:

Nitrogen dioxide is a gas that can bother your eyes, nose, and throat. It may also cause shortness of breath.

### Where To Look:

This gas can come from appliances inside your home that burn fuels such as gas, kerosene, and wood. Appliances that burn fuels are sometimes called fuel-burning appliances.



Use the exhaust fan when cooking on a gas stove.

### **Nitrogen Dioxide—What You Can Do:**

- If possible, use fuel-burning appliances that are vented to the outside. Always follow the maker's instructions on how to use these appliances.
- **Gas cooking stoves:** If you have an exhaust fan in the kitchen, use it when you cook. **Never use the stove to keep you warm or heat your house.**
- **Unvented kerosene or gas space heaters:** Use the proper fuel and keep the heater adjusted the right way. Open a window slightly or use an exhaust fan when you are using the heater.
- **Wood stoves:** Make sure the stove doors are tight fitting. Follow the maker's instructions for starting, burning, and putting out the fire.
- **Fireplaces:** Always open the chimney flue before you build a fire.

## Outdoor Air Pollution

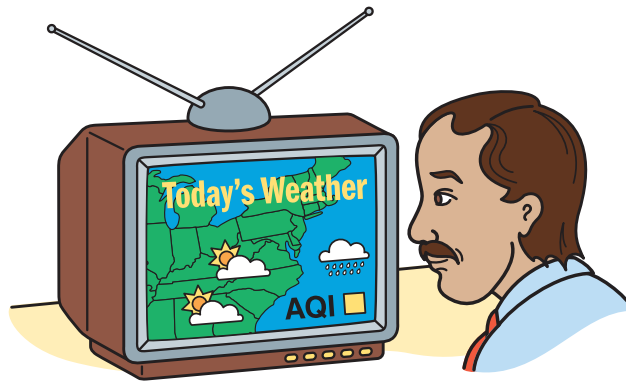
### What It Is:

Small particles and ozone come from things like exhaust from cars and factories, smoke, and road dust.

### Where To Look:

Watch for the Air Quality Index, or AQI, during your local weather report. The AQI is a tool that offers you clear information every day on whether air quality in your area could be a health worry.

The AQI uses colors to show how much pollution is in the air. Green and yellow mean air pollution levels are low. Orange, red or purple mean pollution is at levels that may make asthma worse.



Watch for the AQI during your local weather report.

### **Outdoor Air Pollution—What You Can Do:**

When the AQI reports unhealthy levels (orange, red or purple):

- Have your child play outdoors at times when the air quality is better. In the summer, this may be in the morning.
- Limit outdoor games that involve running hard for a long time.

Pay attention to your child's asthma warning signs. If you start to see signs, limit outdoor activity. Be sure to talk about this with your child's doctor.

## **A Note About Chemical Irritants**

Chemical irritants found in some products in your house may make your child's asthma worse. Your child's asthma may be worse around scented or unscented products, including cleaners, paints, adhesives, pesticides, cosmetics, or air fresheners.

If you find that your child's asthma gets worse when you use a certain product, consider trying different products. If you must use a product, then you should:

- Make sure your child is not around.
- Open windows or doors, or use an exhaust fan.

Remember to always follow the instructions on the label.



## To review Part 2

- Read about asthma triggers.
- Learn all you can about your child's triggers.
- Work with your child's doctor to come up with a plan to control triggers inside your home. Teach your child how to avoid triggers outside your home.
- Make sure all the people who care for your child know your child's triggers and how to control them.
- Talk to your child's doctor if you have removed the triggers and your child's asthma is not getting better.



**Write your child's name here:**

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**Write the name and number of your child's doctor(s) here:**

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**Write the number of your family's pharmacist here:**

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**Write questions to ask the doctor(s) here:**

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**Call one of the toll-free numbers  
on the back of this booklet to:**

- Talk to an asthma expert.
- Find support groups near your home.
- Join in programs for you or your child to learn about controlling asthma.
- Get materials to learn more about asthma.

**Place your child's asthma action plan here.  
Keep a copy of this booklet for each child with asthma.**

## **Get more information**

### **Allergy and Asthma Network**

1-800-878-4403

On the Web: [www.allergyasthmanetwork.org](http://www.allergyasthmanetwork.org)

### **American Lung Association**

1-800-LUNG-USA or 1-800-586-4872

On the Web: [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

### **Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America**

1-800-7-ASTHMA or 1-800-727-8462

On the Web: [www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org)

### **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**

To learn more about controlling indoor asthma triggers, visit [www.epa.gov/asthma](http://www.epa.gov/asthma).

To learn more about the Air Quality Index (AQI), visit [www.epa.gov/airnow](http://www.epa.gov/airnow).

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

To learn more about asthma, visit [www.cdc.gov/asthma](http://www.cdc.gov/asthma).