

## HOW IS ASTHMA CONTROLLED?

The first and most important step to gaining control over asthma is to become educated about asthma and how to avoid or minimize exposure to triggers.

Medications treat airway swelling and bronchoconstriction. A written asthma action plan (developed with your health professional) and a symptom diary are important tools to catch and treat asthma flare-ups early so they don't result in a visit to the emergency room.

## RELIEVER MEDICATIONS

Fast-acting bronchodilators relax the muscles that tighten around the airways. They must act rapidly (in 5-10 minutes) and have a short duration of action (3-4 hours).

A bronchodilator is used only when needed to relieve symptoms. It can also be used before physical exercise to prevent symptoms caused by exercise.

## CONTROLLER/PREVENTER MEDICATIONS

Anti-inflammatory medications reduce and prevent swelling and mucous production in the airways. They are taken daily, even when symptoms are not present.

### Controllers include:

- corticosteroids (inhaled or pills)
- leukotriene receptor antagonists
- long-acting bronchodilators\*\*

\*\*Long-acting bronchodilators relax the muscles around the airways for up to 12 hours. They do not prevent the swelling of the airways.

## TAKE THE TEST

### ASSESS YOUR ASTHMA IN JUST A FEW SECONDS

**1. During the day do you cough, wheeze or have chest tightness because of your asthma 3 or more times a week?**

**2. Does coughing, wheezing or chest tightness wake you 1 or more times a week at night?**

**3. Do you use your rescue inhaler (blue puffer) 3 or more times a week?**

**4. Do you stop exercising or regular activities because of your asthma?**

**SEE YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU ANSWER WITH EVEN ONE YES**

*(2021): CANADIAN THORACIC SOCIETY 2021 GUIDELINES UPDATE: DIAGNOSIS AND MANAGEMENT OF ASTHMA IN PRESCHOOLERS, CHILDREN AND ADULTS, CANADIAN JOURNAL OF RESPIRATORY, CRITICAL CARE, AND SLEEP MEDICINE*

**The New Brunswick Lung Association**  
65 Brunswick St., Fredericton, NB, E3B 1G5  
1-800-565-LUNG (5864) | info@nb.lung.ca

B R E A T H E  
the lung association

# ASTHMA

What you need to know



www.nb.lung.ca

## WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that affects the airways (or breathing passages) within the lungs.

The airways are extra-sensitive to certain triggers which cause them to become narrower. This can happen because of swelling of the airways, a tightening of the muscles around the airways (called bronchoconstriction), or both. These narrowed airways make breathing difficult.

The symptoms of asthma may happen infrequently, or they may be present every day. The severity of the symptoms will be different from person to person, and may even change within a person from time to time.

## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Cough
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

### You may be more likely to develop asthma with:

- A family history of asthma, allergic rhinitis (hay fever), or eczema
- Exposure to air pollution (indoors or outdoors)
- Exposure to occupational exposure to certain things such as chemicals, grain dust, paint, fumes, etc.

## WHAT CAUSES ASTHMA?

The exact causes of asthma are not well known, but health professionals know that certain factors make a person more susceptible to developing asthma.

## TRIGGERS

### Irritant triggers

- cold air or quick changes in temperature
- smoke and second-hand smoke
- scented products
- physical exercise
- fumes
- strong emotions
- hormones

### Allergens

- dust mites
- food allergies
- animal dander
- mould spores
- pollens

### Respiratory infections

- colds
- influenza (flu)
- sinusitis, etc.

## TREATMENT OF ASTHMA

Despite the fact that there are effective asthma medications, the success of treatment depends largely on understanding the disease and reducing exposure to triggers.

## YOUR ASTHMA IS OUT OF CONTROL IF:

- During the day you cough, wheeze, or have chest tightness because of your asthma 3 or more times a week.
- You wake up at night because of coughing, wheezing or feeling short of breath more than once a week
- You are using your rescue medicine (blue puffer) three or more times a week.
- Your asthma symptoms are stopping you from exercising or doing regular activities.

## WHY IS ASTHMA CONTROL IMPORTANT?

Asthma control is important because symptoms can interfere with activities, school, work, and sleep.

Uncontrolled, or poorly controlled, asthma can cause permanent damage to the airways and may lead to death – even in people with mild asthma.

## VACCINATIONS

Pneumonia and influenza can be life-threatening for people with asthma.

Anyone with asthma should receive the **influenza vaccination**, or **flu shot**, yearly. Children up to the age of 18 with asthma should receive **Prevnar<sup>®</sup>13** and **PNEUMOVAX<sup>®</sup>23**, both of which are free when administered by a doctor.