



TAKING CARE OF YOUR ASTHMA



EmblemHealth[®]
WHAT CARE FEELS LIKE.

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a disease that affects the lungs. If you have asthma, you have it all the time, but will have an asthma attack only when something, known as a trigger, bothers your lungs. Here's how it happens:

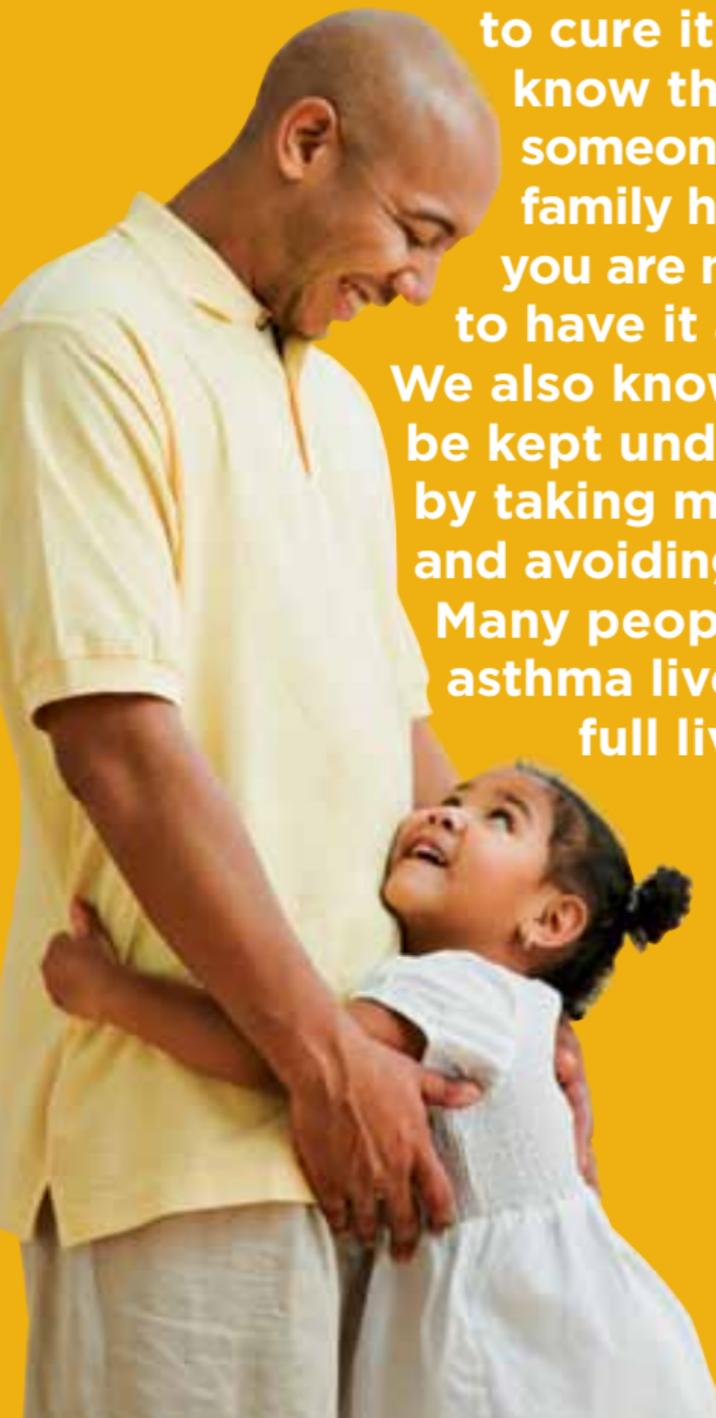
- When your airways come into contact with a trigger, they become inflamed, narrow and fill with mucus.**
- This prevents air from passing through your lungs easily, making it hard to breathe.**
- This causes an asthma attack.**

In most cases, we don't know what causes asthma; nor do we know how

to cure it. We do know that if someone in your family has asthma, you are more likely to have it as well.

We also know it can be kept under control by taking medicine and avoiding triggers.

Many people with asthma live active, full lives.



What are some common triggers of an asthma attack?

Some of the most common asthma triggers are listed below:

- Tobacco smoke
- Dust mites
- Air pollution
- Cockroaches
- Pets
- Mold
- Being sick
- Windy and cold weather

What are the signs and symptoms of asthma?

- Coughing that won't stop, mostly at night
- Wheezing when breathing both in and out
- Shortness of breath or very rapid breathing
- Chest tightness, pain or pressure
- Feeling weak or very tired when exercising
- Feeling tired, easily upset, grouchy or moody
- Having symptoms similar to a cold or allergies (i.e., sneezing, runny or stuffed nose, cough, sore throat or headache)
- Trouble sleeping

How do I know I am having an asthma attack?

In addition to the symptoms described above, you may have:

- Tightening of your neck and chest muscles
- Trouble talking
- Feelings of worry or panic
- Pale, sweaty face
- Blue lips or fingernails

How is asthma treated?

Asthma is most often treated by taking medicine. It is important that you have a good understanding of how asthma medicines work so you know under what conditions to take the different types of medicines that your doctor may prescribe.

Asthma medicines come in two types: long-term controller medicines and quick-relief rescue medicines:

- **Long-term controller medicines** are taken each day to prevent an asthma attack.

- **Quick-relief rescue medicines** are taken for fast relief at the first signs of an asthma attack. This type of medicine will not prevent an attack.

Is it OK to skip a dose of asthma medicine?

You need to take your controller medicine each day to help lower your chance of having an asthma attack. If you are finding it hard to take your medicine on time, see the *Hints to Help You Take Your Medicine* section in this brochure or talk to your doctor.

What other tests are needed?

Your doctor may perform the tests below to see how asthma is affecting your breathing:

- **Spirometry:** This lung function test for asthma is a simple breathing test that measures how much air you can take into your lungs and how quickly you can blow it out. It is often used to find out the amount of blockage in your airways.
- **Peak flow meter:** This portable, easy-to-use tool measures how well your lungs are working. Lower than usual readings are a sign that your lungs may not be working as well which may mean that your asthma is getting worse.

What can happen if asthma is not controlled?

If you are skipping doses of your medicine or do not follow your doctor's treatment plan, you may raise your chance of:

- Frequent asthma attacks
- Visits to the emergency room
- Hospitalizations
- Missed work/school days
- Trouble exercising and taking part in other activities
- Lack of sleep due to nighttime symptoms
- Lungs not working as well for the rest of your life
- Cough that doesn't go away
- Needing a machine to help you breathe (e.g., a ventilator)
- Death

The medicine your doctor prescribed can help control your asthma and its symptoms. But if you don't take your medicine exactly as your doctor orders, you increase your chance of having an asthma attack.

This brochure can help you get the most out of your medicine. Read the hints below and go over the *Questions for Your Doctor* section during your next office visit.

An Asthma Action Plan can help you take charge of your asthma. You should develop your plan with your doctor.

The plan will:

- List the medicines you are taking and when to take them.
- Describe how to control asthma long-term and handle your asthma if it gets worse.
- Explain when you need to call the doctor or go to the emergency room.

You can download an Asthma Action Plan that you can fill out with your doctor at www.emblemhealth.com/asthmaactionplan.

HINTS TO HELP YOU TAKE YOUR MEDICINE

- Make taking your asthma controller medicine part of your daily routine. Leave your medicine where you brush your teeth to help you remember to take it.
- Set the alarm on your watch, clock or cell phone to help remind you to take your medicine at the right time.
- Some medicines work better when taken with food while others do not. If your medicine should be taken with food, keep it on the kitchen counter as a reminder to take it with your meal.
- Ask a friend or family member to call you to help remind you to take your medicine. It's a great way to stay in touch, too!



QUESTIONS FOR YOUR DOCTOR

1. Why am I taking this medicine and how will it help control my asthma? _____

2. How often and at what times of the day should I take this medicine? _____

3. What should I do if I miss a dose? _____

4. Should I take all the medicine even though I feel fine? _____

5. How can I tell if this medicine is working? Are there any tests I need while taking this medicine? _____

6. Are there any side effects from this medicine? _____

7. How long will I need to take this medicine? Do I need a refill? _____

8. Does my prescription drug plan cover this medicine? Is there a generic option available? _____

9. Can I get a 90-day supply? * Can I order this medicine through the mail? _____

***You may be able to get a 90-day supply and/or order your medicine through the mail!** If you have questions about your prescription drug coverage, visit www.emblemhealth.com or call Customer Service at the phone number on the back of your member ID card.