

ADULT ASTHMA TOOLKIT



A guide to understanding, managing,
and living well with asthma



Created in partnership with the INHALE Patient Advisory Board



What is INHALE?

At Inspiring Health Advances in Lung Care (INHALE), we work with healthcare providers across Michigan to help you breathe easier. Whether you or your child has asthma or you are living with COPD, we are here to support you. Asthma affects about 12% of people in Michigan, so you are not alone.

Visit inhalecqi.org for more tips and resources.

The INHALE Patient Advisory Board made this toolkit to help you take control of your asthma. Inside, you'll find easy information and tools to help you and your caregivers understand and manage your asthma.



UNDERSTANDING ASTHMA

Asthma is a long-term condition that makes it hard to move air in and out of your lungs. Certain things, called triggers (like allergens, smoke, or changes in weather), can make your airways:

- Swollen
- Filled with mucus
- Tighten up

Learn more:

- [What is asthma?](#)
- [Signs and symptoms](#)
- [Allergic \(eosinophilic\) asthma](#)

Recognizing Symptoms

Common symptoms include:

- Coughing (with or without a cold, after exercise, at night)
- Tightness or heaviness in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing (a whistling or hissing sound)

Who Can Have Asthma?

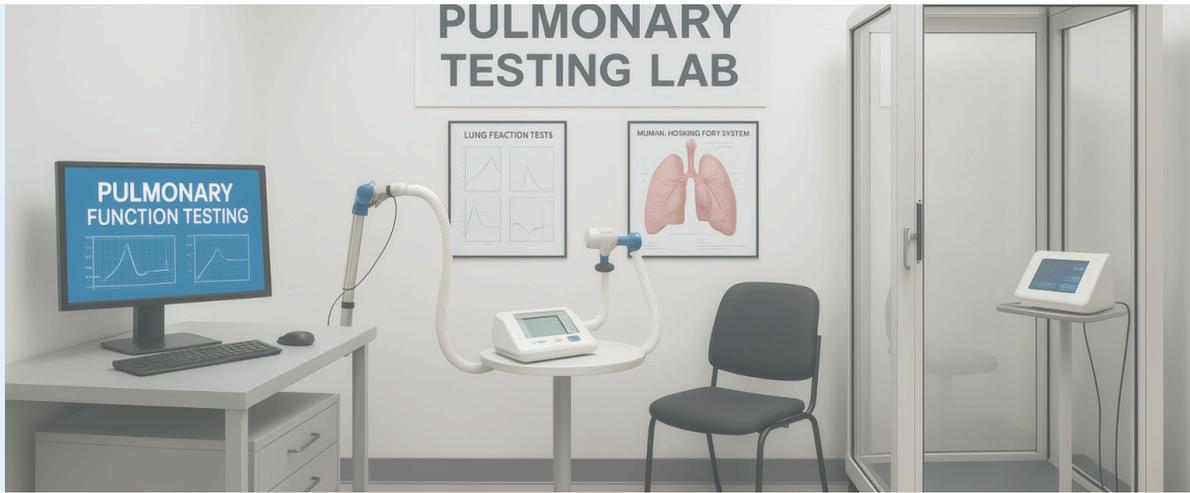
Asthma affects people of all ages and backgrounds.

- [Asthma in the Black community](#)
- [Asthma in women](#)
- [Asthma in children](#)
- [Asthma in pregnancy](#)





DIAGNOSIS & DOCTOR VISITS



What to Expect at a Doctor's Appointment

Your primary care doctor can help you make a treatment plan and prescribe the right medicines. If your asthma is hard to control, you may be sent to a:

- **Pulmonologist:** A lung doctor who treats hard-to-control asthma. They may do breathing tests (like spirometry), blood tests, and other checks to learn how to manage your asthma.
- **Allergist:** A doctor who helps find allergy triggers that may be causing your asthma symptoms.
- **ENT** (Ear, Nose, and Throat doctor): Helps with sinus, ear, or throat problems that can make asthma worse.

Prepare for your visit:

- Write down your symptoms, medications, and questions.
- Bring your inhalers or medication list.
- Use our Patient Checklist.

What else can I expect at my doctor's visit?





How do I know if my asthma is not under control?



ASTHMA MEDICATIONS

Finding the right asthma medicine can take time. Here are some types of medicines your doctor may talk about:

- **Long-term controller:** You take this every day so it can work well. It helps keep your lungs open, reduces swelling, and helps prevent asthma flares.
- **Quick reliever/rescue:** You use this when your breathing suddenly gets worse. It helps air move in and out of your lungs. If you need this medicine often, your asthma may not be under good control.
- **SMART Therapy:** This uses one inhaler that has both an inhaled steroid and a long-acting reliever. You use the same inhaler every day and when you need quick relief.
- **Steroids (pills or syrup):** These help reduce swelling in your airways very fast when your breathing is really bad. They work quickly but should only be taken when your doctor tells you to.

| Type | Example | What They Do |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Long-Term Controller | Flovent, Singulair | Taken daily to reduce swelling and prevent flare-ups |
| Quick Reliever (Rescue) | Albuterol | Used when breathing suddenly worsens |
| SMART Therapy | Inhaled steroid + long-acting reliever | one inhaler for daily use <i>and</i> rescue doses |
| Oral Steroids | Prednisone, Dexamethasone | Quickly reduce airway swelling during severe attacks |

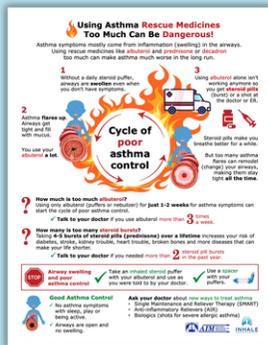




ASTHMA CONTROL

Taking care of your asthma helps you breathe better and feel better every day. Using your inhaler the right way and taking your medicine as your doctor tells you keeps your lungs healthy and helps prevent flare-ups. When your asthma is well controlled, you may need oral steroids less often, which is healthier for your body. Small daily steps can make a big difference.

Tools for Understanding Control



Taking oral steroids (OCS) too often can be harmful for people with asthma. They can help when your asthma gets very bad, but using them a lot can cause problems like weight gain, mood changes, and weaker bones. Keeping your asthma under good control can help you need OCS less often.

[Learn more here.](#)



The [Inhaler Education Toolkit](#) was created to help you learn how to use your inhaler the right way. It includes easy-to-follow tips, videos, and tools to make sure your medicine works as well as it should—helping you breathe easier and stay in control of your asthma.



Check out the [INHALE CQI YouTube channel](#) for short videos that show how to use different inhalers the right way. Watching these step-by-step guides can help you feel more confident and make sure you're getting the most from your medicine.

[Explore More Tools](#)



MANAGING ASTHMA

Using an asthma action plan helps you notice early symptoms, know what steps to take, and stay in control of your breathing each day.

A **SMART Asthma Action Plan** helps you use one inhaler for both daily control and quick relief. This makes it easier to manage symptoms, prevent flare-ups, and lower your chance of needing oral steroids or emergency care.

6-17 years old

Download

18+ years old

Download

American Lung Association Asthma Action Plan (not compatible with SMART)

Download

Pregnancy and Lactation Asthma Action Plan

Download



ASTHMA TRIGGERS

People with asthma can be affected by things in their environment called triggers. Triggers can cause coughing, wheezing, or trouble breathing. Common triggers include:

- pollen
- dust
- smoke
- pet dander
- cold air
- strong scents

Everyone's triggers are different. Learning which ones bother you can help prevent flare-ups and keep your asthma under control.

Different environment, different triggers

Keep in mind that different environments have different allergens:

- **Schools and other enclosed spaces** attract a lot of dust, mites, pests, and mold
- **Workplaces** can have hundreds of triggers we're normally not exposed to
- **Outdoors**, pollen, air pollution, and every day weather can set off asthma.

Additional Information

- [Potential Asthma Triggers](#)
- [Outdoor Air Pollution](#)
- [Indoor Air Quality](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [Secondhand Smoke and Vaping](#)
 - [Learn more about vaping](#)
- [Marijuana Use](#)
- [Hookah use](#)

The National Health, Lung, and Blood Institute has put together an [infographic for managing asthma everyday](#).



MANAGING YOUR HEALTH WITH ASTHMA



DIET

Eating healthy foods can help you manage your asthma. Nutritious, anti-inflammatory foods support your lungs, may help reduce triggers like reflux, and keep your immune system strong. Food cannot replace your asthma medicines, but healthy choices can make breathing easier and help prevent flare-ups.

[LEARN MORE](#)



QUITTING SMOKING

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your asthma. Smoke irritates your airways and makes symptoms worse. It can also make your medicines work less well. When you quit, your lungs work better, you have fewer flare-ups, and breathing gets easier over time.

[LEARN MORE](#)



EXERCISE

Regular exercise can make your lungs stronger and help you breathe easier. It improves your fitness, reduces inflammation, and can help you control your asthma symptoms. With a good warm-up and the right medicine plan, staying active can be an important part of managing asthma.

[LEARN MORE](#)



FINDING COMMUNITY

Connecting with a community can make managing asthma easier. Sharing tips and experiences with people who understand can reduce stress, build confidence, and help you feel less alone as you deal with asthma.

[LEARN MORE](#)



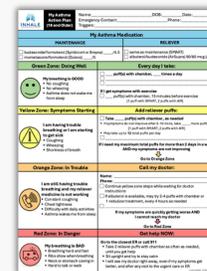
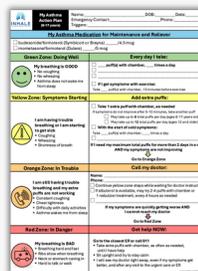


ASTHMA FLARES

Asthma flare-ups (attacks) often have early warning signs that can be mild or more serious. Look over the list below and work with your doctor and family to create a plan for what to do when these symptoms appear.

RED ZONE signs on asthma action plans:

- Breathing hard and fast
- Ribs show when breathing
- Neck or stomach caving in
- Hard to talk or walk



If you're in the **Red Zone**-get help **NOW**-go to the closest Emergency Room or call **911**

- Take extra puffs with chamber, as often as needed, until you have help
- Sit upright and try to stay calm
- See your doctor right away, even after you are better, after any visit to urgent care or the ER

When should I go to urgent care / Emergency Room?

How does a peak flow meter help manage asthma flares?

How can Medicaid/Children's Special Health Care Services can help with Asthma Control?



Peak Flow Meter





MEDICATION ASSISTANCE

If you're having trouble affording your asthma medications, you're not alone. Many patients benefit from savings programs, generics, insurance options, or community resources that can help lower costs. Talk with your healthcare team so you don't have to skip doses or go without the medicines that keep you breathing well.

What should I do if I can't afford my medicine or devices? Click on the links below to learn more:

- [Affording inhalers](#)
- [What do I do if my medication isn't available but I need it right away?](#)

Help with other health concerns and transportation to appointments:

- [Michigan 211](#)





WORDS & DEFINITIONS

- **Action Plan** – a plan you create with your doctor for what makes your asthma worse and what to do when it gets hard to breathe.
- **Air Quality/Pollution** – particles and pollution in the air that make it hard to breathe.
- **Allergist** – a doctor that treats allergy and asthma.
- **Anti Inflammatory Reliever (AIR) Therapy** – a way to manage asthma that gives you a medicine that stops the inflammation (swelling) and bronchoconstriction (squeezing) either in two different inhalers or in one.
- **Asthma** – Asthma is a lung condition that inflames the lungs and makes it hard to breathe.
- **Asthma flare/attack/exacerbation**– when asthma symptoms like cough, wheezing, shortness of breath get worse. The asthma action plan will tell you what to look for and what to do.
- **Device** – a tool like an inhaler that will be used to deliver the medicine you will take.
- **Eosinophil** – a white blood cell in our body that is a part of our immune system. They help fight infections and allergens.
- **Inhaler** – a device that sends medicine into the lungs.
- **Long-term controller** – Long-term Controller medicines must be taken every day to work right. They keep your breathing tubes from swelling and get rid of asthma symptoms. Using them regularly as prescribed will decrease your risk of having another asthma flare-up. You should always brush your teeth and rinse your mouth out after using the medicine. Some common Long-term Controller Medicines are: Fluticasone (Flovent), Budesonide (Pulmicort), Fluticasone propionate and salmeterol (Advair), Montelukast (Singulair).
- **Otolaryngologist or ear, nose, and throat doctor**– a doctor that treats the ears, nose, and throat.
- **Peak Flow Meter** – A peak flow meter helps you check how well your asthma is doing.
- **Primary Care Doctor** – this doctor is the doctor you see regularly for visits such as your yearly physical and the doctor you call when you have any concerns about your health.
- **Pulmonologist** – a doctor that treats the lungs.
- **Quick Reliever/Rescue** – used when breathing gets bad so air can get in and out of the lungs. If you need to take this medicine a lot, your asthma is not in control. Common quick reliever medications are: Albuterol, levabuterol, pirbuterol.
- **Single Maintenance Reliever Therapy (SMART)** – a way to treat asthma using one inhaler containing an inhaled steroid (inhaled corticosteroid) and a long-acting reliever (long-acting beta-agonist) for both daily doses (maintenance) and reliever (rescue) doses.
- **Steroids (also known as oral corticosteroids)** – medicines like prednisolone or dexamethasone that work very fast to make breathing normal. They should not be taken all the time, only when breathing gets really bad. Common oral corticosteroids are: prednisone, prednisolone, dexamethasone.
- **Triggers** – each person will have different things that make their asthma worse. It could be food, smoke, allergies, animals, or other triggers like a common cold. It is important you know what your triggers are and ways to control them.



THANK YOU

We hope this toolkit helps you understand your asthma and feel more confident managing it. Remember, you are not alone—your healthcare team, family, and community are here to support you. With the right tools, a clear plan, and good communication with your providers, you can take control of your asthma and breathe easier every day.

