What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a long-term condition that affects the small breathing tubes in your lungs. When asthma makes it difficult for you to breathe, you’re having what’s called a “flare-up.”

During a flare-up, your breathing tubes:
- Begin to swell (inflammation).
- Fill with mucus.
- Are tightened by the muscles around them (bronchospasm).

Manage Asthma

When asthma is under control, it shouldn’t stop you from doing any of your normal activities. Having constant or seasonal asthma symptoms isn’t something you need to live with.

To manage your asthma, you should:
- Avoid things that trigger your asthma.
- Use your asthma medications properly.
- Get a flu shot every year.
- Follow your Asthma Action Plan.

Signs your asthma may be out of control:
- Using a rescue inhaler 2 or more times a week.
- Waking up 2 or more times a month from asthma.
- Refilling a rescue inhaler more than 2 times a year.

Common asthma triggers:
- Seasonal pollens
- Respiratory viruses such as colds or flu
- Pet dander
- Dust mites
- Mold
- Secondhand smoke
- Air pollution or poor air quality
- Certain chemicals or strong smells
- Physical activity (exercise)
2 Types of Asthma Medications

Controller medications

“Controllers” reduce asthma symptoms and your need to use a rescue inhaler. These medications decrease swelling (inflammation) and mucus in your breathing tubes. After a few weeks, you should have fewer symptoms.

Some people use a controller year-round. Others may only need it at certain times of the year, such as spring. Your doctor will tell you when to use your controller, and if it’s okay to stop using it.

It’s important to use it every day (usually once or twice a day), even when you’re feeling fine. Skipping days will make it less effective.

Rescue inhaler medications

This type of medication opens your breathing tubes and provides relief, but only for a few hours. Rescue inhalers won’t prevent things that cause asthma to flare up. They should only be used when you need them.

If exercise causes your asthma to flare up, use your rescue inhaler 15 to 20 minutes before you begin.

How to Use Your Metered Dose Inhaler with a Spacer

• Shake the inhaler well and insert it into the spacer.
• Place the spacer mouthpiece in your mouth after exhaling. Keep the inhaler level.
• Spray 1 puff and breathe in slowly and deeply. If the spacer whistles, breathe in slower.
• Hold your breath for 10 seconds, then exhale slowly.
• If more medication is needed, wait 1 minute and repeat the steps.
• Rinse your mouth with water after using your controller inhaler.
• Refill when you have 10 days of medicine left.
• Most inhalers have counters to show how many doses are left.
• Clean your inhaler and spacer once a week. Follow the instructions that came with your devices.