

# Know the triggers

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## To control asthma symptoms



**Children's**<sup>SM</sup>  
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Asthma is a common lung condition in children. Although there is no cure, asthma can be controlled.

Asthma attacks, also called asthma episodes, can be mild, moderate or life-threatening. Asthma attacks cause breathing problems. You may notice wheezing, coughing or chest tightness. Asthma attacks start when the airways (lungs) are bothered by something. These things are called asthma triggers. Each child's triggers are different. Ask for a written asthma plan from the doctor to learn how to control asthma and avoid triggers. Below are some common triggers and tips to avoid them.

### Smoke

Smoke can trigger an asthma attack. Avoid being close to smoke from cigarettes, pipes, cigars, fireplaces, grills and burning wood.

Do not allow smoke in the home, car or near the child.

### Colds and Flu

Practice good hand washing to help prevent colds and illness. Children age 6 months and older with asthma and people who care for children with asthma should get a flu shot each year.

### Exercise

Being active is important to staying healthy. Talk to the doctor about preventing asthma attacks during exercise, sports or gym class. The child may need to use asthma medicine before exercise. Exercise indoors when smog or pollen levels are high or in cold weather. Make time to warm up and cool down.

### Weather

Rain, wind, cold temperatures and sudden weather changes can trigger an asthma attack. Have the child wear a scarf over his mouth and nose when it is cold outside.

### Pets

Keep pets out of the bedroom and classroom. Pets should be kept outdoors if possible. Keep pets away from furniture, carpet and stuffed toys. Keep pets and floors clean. Vacuum carpets and rugs often.

### Roaches and pests

Store food in airtight containers. Clean all food crumbs and spills right away. Keep lids on trash cans. Clean counters, sinks, tables and floors.

### Odors

Do not spray or use products with strong odors near the child. Avoid perfumes, air fresheners, cleaning products, art supplies and paint.

### Mold

Wash mold off of surfaces. Fix leaky plumbing. Keep indoor humidity between 30 percent to 60 percent in homes and schools.

### Dust mites

These are tiny bugs you cannot see that can live anywhere. At home, wash sheets and blankets in hot water each week. Put dust-proof covers on mattresses and pillows. Keep stuffed toys off the bed. At home and school, keep furniture clean. Vacuum carpets and rugs often. Use wood or vinyl flooring if possible.

### Air pollution

Spend less time outdoors when smog levels are high. Parents, teachers and coaches should be aware of a child's response to smog and signs of any breathing trouble. Do your part to help clean the air. Walk, bike, carpool or take the train or bus. Avoid idling. Turn off cars, trucks and school buses when not moving.

## Using a metered dose inhaler (MDI)

- No one knows when an asthma attack will happen. It can happen at home, at school, on a school bus, during field trips, at sports practice, etc. A child always needs fast, easy access to quick-relief medicine.
- Make sure the school has quick-relief medicine for the child. If the child uses an inhaler each day, keep a backup inhaler at school in case the other one is lost, forgotten at home or empty.
- Make sure the inhaler has medicine in it. Even if the MDI puffs when pressed or you shake it and feel something inside after all doses have been used, it may be out of medicine and have just the propellant left. Know how many puffs (doses) are in the inhaler. Ask the child daily if the medicine was used. Count puffs used and keep a log. Get a new inhaler when doses left are low. Check expiration dates and replace when needed.

## How to use the MDI

1. Prime the inhaler before use according to the manufacturer's instructions.
2. Stand or sit up straight.
3. Take off cap and shake the inhaler.
4. Use a spacer/holding chamber with the inhaler. It helps the medicine reach the lungs where it is needed.
5. Insert inhaler in end of the spacer.
6. Breathe out all the way.
7. Place spacer mouthpiece in mouth. Press down on the inhaler and take a slow, deep breath. Hold breath for 10 seconds then breathe out. If using a spacer with a mask, place mask firmly on face, covering nose and mouth. Press down on inhaler and breathe in and out slowly six times.
8. If the child is to take more than one puff, allow one minute between puffs. Shake the MDI before each puff.
9. Rinse the mouth after using any inhaled steroid medicine. If using a spacer with a mask, wipe face after use.

## Tips to control asthma

- Ask the doctor for a written asthma management/emergency plan. Share the plan with the school and others who care for the child.
- Learn the child's triggers. Take steps to avoid them.
- Ensure that the child always has easy access to quick-relief medicine.
- Parents, teachers and coaches can take a class to learn more about asthma management.
- If quick-relief medicine is used more than twice a week, it may be a sign that asthma is not under control. Talk to the doctor.

## Tools for schools

Help improve air quality in your school. The Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools Kit is available from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Call the Georgia state IAQ contact at the EPA at 404-657-6534 or visit [epa.gov/iaq](http://epa.gov/iaq) for more information.

## To learn more

Go to [choa.org/asthma](http://choa.org/asthma) to learn more about asthma. Other online resources include:

- [nhlbi.nih.gov](http://nhlbi.nih.gov)
- [epa.gov](http://epa.gov)
- [lung.org](http://lung.org)
- [cleanaircampaign.com](http://cleanaircampaign.com)