

## **Asthma: you can control it**

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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Too many people suffer needlessly from asthma. Unfortunately, some people with asthma “get by” by avoiding doing things that might make their asthma worse. But people can reduce suffering and live an active life despite asthma. Asthma can be controlled with the right medicines as well as by taking other simple steps.

Medicines for asthma can be divided into two groups: controller medicines that prevent attacks and rescue medicines that treat attacks.

Controller medicines help reduce swelling in the airways in the lungs to prevent asthma attacks. To work well they must be taken regularly, even if a person is not having symptoms.

Controller medicines include inhaled steroids. These inhaled steroids are very different from steroids taking by professional athletes. When used as directed, they are safe.

Rescue medicines provide immediate relief during an asthma attack. These medicines, called bronchodilators, help open the airways by relaxing the airway muscles. They can be used on a regular basis or only when needed to quickly reduce symptoms.

Not everyone needs the same medicines. Many people with asthma use both long-term controller and quick-relief rescue medications. Mild asthma may only require rescue medications. However, when people need rescue medication more than twice a week, it might mean that they need more controller medicine.

The right medication depends on age, symptoms, and other individual factors. Children with asthma are treated with the same medications, although doses may be smaller. Because asthma changes over time, be sure to work with a doctor regularly to monitor symptoms and make adjustments as needed.

Simple steps to do right now to ease asthma symptoms and be more active are:

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—Use a peak flow meter every day at home to test your breathing. You may be warned of an impending asthma attack so you can pre-treat before you have serious problems. Peak flow meters are included in the Asthma Toolkits!

—Don't rely on cheap dust masks. While cheap dust masks may keep large particles away from your mouth and nose, they do not keep out small particles and are not adequate for good asthma management.

—Develop an asthma action plan with your doctor. This is the simplest way to understand and manage your asthma. It may save your life!

—Start an asthma diary. There's no cure for asthma, but monitoring it can help reduce symptoms and help prevent attacks.

—Discuss with your doctor what you can do to educate your child's school nurse, teacher and other adults who may be caring for your child.

—Know and avoid your asthma triggers. Triggers may include pets, tobacco smoke, mold, dust, chemical fumes and allergens such as grass, weeds and flowers.

—Stay inside on windy and dusty days.

Discuss your medications and asthma care plan with your doctor. The Asthma Toolkit Program can help improve the care of people with asthma living in eastern Colorado. Ask for your free Asthma Toolkit from your local primary care doctor.

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