

Breathing Easier

A Special Newsletter for MVP Members

What is asthma?

Asthma causes swelling and inflammation in the airways that lead to your lungs. When asthma flares up, the airways tighten and become narrower. This keeps the air from passing through easily and makes it hard for you to breathe. These flare-ups are also called asthma attacks or exacerbations.

Asthma affects people in different ways. Some people have asthma attacks only during allergy season, or when they breathe in cold air, or when they exercise. Others have many bad attacks that send them to the doctor often.

Even if you have few asthma attacks, you still need to treat your asthma. The swelling and inflammation in your airways can lead to permanent changes in your airways and harm your lungs.

Many people with asthma live active, full lives. Although asthma is a lifelong disease, treatment can help control it and help you stay healthy.

What causes asthma?

Experts don't know exactly what causes asthma. But there are some things we do know:

- Asthma runs in families.
- Asthma is much more common in people who have allergies, though not everyone with allergies gets asthma.
- Pollution may cause asthma or make it worse.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of asthma can be mild or severe. You may have mild attacks now and then, or you may have severe symptoms every day. Or you may have something in between. How often you have symptoms can also change. When you have asthma, you may:

- Wheeze, making a loud or soft whistling noise when you breathe in and out.
- Cough a lot.
- Feel tightness in your chest.
- Feel short of breath.
- Have trouble sleeping because of coughing or having a hard time breathing.
- Quickly get tired during exercise.

Your symptoms may be worse at night.

Severe asthma attacks can be life-threatening and need emergency treatment.

How is asthma diagnosed?

Along with doing a physical exam and asking about your health, your doctor may order lung function tests. These tests include:

- Spirometry. Doctors use this test to diagnose and keep track of asthma. It measures how quickly you can move air in and out of your lungs and how much air you move.
- Peak expiratory flow (PEF). This shows how much air you can breathe out when you try your hardest.
- An exercise or inhalation challenge. This test measures how your breathing is affected by exercise or after taking a medicine.
- A chest X-ray, to see if another disease is causing your symptoms.
- Allergy tests, if your doctor thinks your symptoms may be caused by allergies.

You will need routine checkups with your doctor to keep track of your asthma and decide on treatment.



How is it treated?

There are two parts to treating asthma, which are outlined in your asthma action plan. The goals are to:

- **Control asthma over the long term.** Your asthma action plan tells you which medicine to take. It also helps you track your symptoms and know how well the treatment is working. Many people take controller medicine—usually an inhaled corticosteroid—every day. Taking it every day helps to reduce the swelling of the airways and prevent attacks. Your doctor will show you how to use your inhaler. This is very important so you get the right amount of medicine to help you breathe better.
- **Treat asthma attacks when they occur.** Your asthma action plan tells you what to do when you have an asthma attack. It helps you identify triggers that can cause your attacks. You use quick-relief medicine, such as albuterol, during an attack.

If you need to use the quick-relief inhaler more often than usual, talk to your doctor. This may be a sign that your asthma is not controlled and can cause problems.

Asthma attacks can be life-threatening, but you may be able to prevent them if you follow a plan. Your doctor can teach you the skills you need to use your asthma action plan.

To access the formulary, visit mvphealthcare.com, and select *Members*, then *Prescription Benefits*. If you have trouble locating the formulary, please call the MVP Customer Care Center at the phone number on the back of your MVP Member ID card.

How can you prevent asthma attacks?

You can prevent some asthma attacks by avoiding those things that cause them. These are called triggers. A trigger can be:

- Irritants in the air, such as cigarette smoke or other kinds of air pollution. Don't smoke, and try to avoid being around others when they smoke.
- Things you are allergic to, such as pet dander, dust mites, cockroaches, or pollen. When you can, avoid those things you are allergic to. It may also help to take certain kinds of allergy medicine.
- Exercise. Ask your doctor about using a quick-relief inhaler before you exercise if this is a trigger for you.
- Other things like dry, cold air; an infection; or some medicines, such as aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Try not to exercise outside when it is cold and dry. Talk to your doctor about vaccines to prevent some infections. And ask about what medicines you should avoid.

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MVP Health Care offers a health management program for members living with asthma. For more information or to see if you qualify, call 1-866-942-7966. MVP's program is based on a collaborative guideline (including the NYSDOH, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, professional organizations, MVP and other health plans from across the state) derived from the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Third Expert Report Clinical Guideline for the Diagnosis, Evaluation, and Management of Adults and Children with Asthma.

Information in this newsletter does not constitute medical advice. If you have questions about your health, talk to your doctor.

Health benefit plans are issued or administered by MVP Health Plan, Inc.; MVP Health Insurance Company; MVP Select Care, Inc.; and MVP Health Services Corp., operating subsidiaries of MVP Health Care, Inc. Not all plans available in all states and counties.



Contact Us

For more information, call **1-866-942-7966**
Monday–Friday, 8:30 am–5:00 pm
TTY: **1-800-662-1220**

We value your opinion.

Please fill out a brief, anonymous survey at mvplistsens.com. We will use this information to create a better experience for all of our members. All responses are 100 percent confidential. The survey only takes a few minutes to complete.

Quick Tips for Being Prepared to Talk to Your Doctor

Patients who have good relationships with their doctors are more satisfied with their care and have better results. Here are some tips to help you and your doctor become better partners in improving your health care:

- Write down your questions before your visit. List the most important ones first to make sure they get asked and answered.
- Bring a “health history” list with you, and keep it up to date.
- Always bring any medications you are taking, including over-the-counter, or a list of those medications (include when and how often you take them) and what strength.
- You might want to bring someone along to help you ask questions and remember the answers.
- Find more information and printable forms at **mvphealthcare.com**.

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)



MVP has online resources to help you take charge of your health.

Make informed decisions about your health by using the Healthwise® Knowledgebase—our online Health Encyclopedia. Curious about the medications you take every day? Visit **mvphealthcare.com** and select *Members*, then *Health & Wellness*. The MVP Healthwise Knowledgebase is your one-stop resource for the latest health information.



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