

# Breathing Easier

A Special Newsletter for MVP Members

# Identifying Your Triggers

Asthma is a long-lasting (chronic) disease of the respiratory system. It causes inflammation in tubes that carry air to the lungs (bronchial tubes). The inflammation makes your bronchial tubes likely to overreact to certain triggers. An overreaction can lead to decreased lung function, sudden difficulty breathing, and other symptoms of an asthma attack.

## If you avoid triggers, you can:

- Prevent some asthma attacks.
- Reduce the frequency and severity of some attacks.

You may not be able to avoid or even want to avoid all your asthma triggers. But you can ask your doctor how to identify some of the things that trigger your symptoms. He or she may suggest:

- Being tested for allergies. If you have allergies, the substances to which you are allergic can trigger symptoms.
- Monitoring your lung function (peak expiratory flow). Your lungs will not work as well when you are around a trigger.

## How to Identify Asthma Triggers

1. **Identify possible asthma triggers.** A trigger is anything that can lead to an asthma attack. When you are around something that triggers your symptoms, keep track of it. This can help you find a pattern in what triggers your symptoms. Record triggers in your asthma diary or on your asthma action plan.
2. **Monitor your lung function.** Check yourself for asthma symptoms. Watch for things like being short of breath, having chest tightness, coughing, and wheezing. Also notice if symptoms wake you up at night or if you get tired quickly when you exercise. If your doctor recommends it, measure your peak expiratory flow (PEF). A trigger may not always cause symptoms. But it can still narrow your bronchial tubes, which makes your lungs work harder. To identify triggers that do not always cause immediate symptoms, you can measure your PEF throughout the day. PEF will drop when your bronchial tubes narrow, so your PEF will drop when you are near things that trigger symptoms.
3. **Be tested for allergies.** Skin or blood testing may be used to diagnose allergies to certain substances. Skin testing involves pricking the skin on your back or arms with one or more small doses of specific allergens. The amount of swelling and redness at the sites where your skin was pricked is measured to identify allergens to which you react.
4. **Share your trigger record with your doctor.** After you have found some things that may trigger your asthma, you and your doctor can devise a plan for how to deal with them.



**MVP has online resources available 24 hours a day 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](https://www.mvphealthcare.com) and select *Members*, then *Health & Wellness*. The MVP Healthwise Knowledgebase is your one-stop resource for the latest health information.



# Overuse of Quick-Relief Medicines

Medicines for quick relief of the narrowed bronchial tubes caused by asthma include short-acting beta2-agonists. These medicines relieve sudden increases of symptoms (asthma attacks) quickly. **But overuse may be harmful.**

Overuse of short-acting beta2-agonists has been associated with worsening asthma and increased risk of death. People who have severe asthma usually are the ones at greatest risk for illness and death from asthma. They may be taking higher doses of short-acting beta2-agonists to control their symptoms instead of increasing the use of anti-inflammatory medicine such as inhaled corticosteroids.

People who overuse short-acting beta2-agonists may feel their asthma is under control when, in fact, inflammation in the airways is becoming worse, putting them in danger of a severe, life-threatening attack (status asthmaticus).

## Overuse:

- May delay medical care and increase your chances of having a severe asthma attack that can be life-threatening.
- Can decrease the future effectiveness of these medicines.
- Treats the early narrowing of bronchial tubes without treating long-term inflammation.

In general, you may need more long-term treatment if you are using short-acting beta2-agonists on more than two days a week (except before exercise). Talk to your doctor if you are using your quick-relief medicine this often. Frequent use of quick-relief medicines may mean that your symptoms and inflammation are not well controlled.

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.

# 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 **[mvphhealthcare.com](http://mvphhealthcare.com)**.

Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)



## 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](http://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.

# Reduce Your Risk of the Flu and Pneumonia

It is important to get vaccinated against the flu and pneumonia. Many pneumonia-related deaths are preventable through vaccination and appropriate treatment. Pneumonia is a lung infection that can cause mild to severe illness in people of all ages. Signs of it include: coughing, fever, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, rapid breathing or shortness of breath, chills, or chest pain.

## Certain people are more likely to become ill with pneumonia:

- Adults 65 years of age or older
- Children younger than five years of age
- People under the age of 65 who have underlying medical conditions (like diabetes or HIV/AIDS)
- People ages 19–64 who smoke cigarettes or have asthma

## There are several strategies for preventing pneumonia and other respiratory infections such as colds and the flu:

- Wash your hands regularly.
- Clean hard surfaces that are touched often (like doorknobs and countertops).
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue, your elbow or sleeve.
- Limit your exposure to cigarette smoke.
- Take steps to treat, control and prevent conditions like diabetes and HIV/AIDS.

Get vaccinated. In the United States, several vaccines prevent infections that can cause pneumonia, including Pneumococcal, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), Pertussis (whooping cough) and seasonal influenza (flu) vaccines. Talk to your health care provider for more information on these vaccines.

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