

MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



Using An Action Plan to Manage Asthma

What Is An Action Plan?

An action plan is a written, customized plan to help you manage asthma episodes. The action plan is based on changes in asthma symptoms. Peak flow numbers may also be part of your asthma action plan. Your action plan will give you and your family information about when and how to use daily medications, emergency medications and your peak flow meter. It will also help you decide when to call your health care provider and when to seek emergency medical care. Using the plan can help you and your family take action to manage your asthma. Taking action can prevent asthma from getting worse. If you know what to watch for and what steps to take, you will be able to make timely and appropriate decisions about managing your condition.

What Should the Action Plan Include?

At National Jewish, we believe action plans should be individualized. Your health care provider, together with you and your family will develop an action plan just for you. When you have specific instructions on actions to take based on your asthma symptoms and peak flow numbers, you can manage asthma episodes more effectively. Your action plan should include the following information:

- **Asthma Symptoms** Asthma symptoms to watch for include, coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and chest tightness. Your action plan should tell you what to do when you awaken at night with asthma symptoms and when you need to increase treatments to manage asthma symptoms. Your plan will be based on the severity or seriousness of these symptoms.
- **Peak Flow Numbers and Peak Flow Zones** You may also use a peak flow meter. Peak flow numbers measure how well you are breathing. If your peak flow number drops, it means you are having trouble breathing. Peak flow zones can be used to signal you when your peak flow drops a certain percentage. Your health care provider help you determine your zones.

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- **Asthma Medications** Some asthma medications are taken every day. These are long term control medications. Some medications are increased when your asthma gets worse. There are some medications that should only be taken when you are having an asthma episode. These are quick relief medications. Together with your health care provider, you will develop instructions about when to take asthma medications.
- **Emergency Telephone Numbers and Locations of Emergency Care** Your written action plan should include information about who to call and where to get emergency care. Your health care provider will be able to give you telephone numbers and locations for emergency care during the day or night. You should also write down numbers of relatives, friends and other people who can help you in an emergency.

Specific Points to Clarify with Your Health Care Provider

There are five points that your health care provider should specifically clarify for you. Include this information in your action plan. Even if your health care provider does not provide a written action plan, you should specifically ask your health care provider the answers to the following five questions.

- When should you call your health care provider?
- When should you seek emergency care?
- When is quick relief medicine not enough?
- When or if you should increase inhaled steroids?
- When or if you should start taking oral steroids?

Making Your Action Plan Work for You

Your action plan can help you manage your asthma symptoms. Photocopy your written plan and give it to those who can assist you in using the plan. People who should have a copy of the action plan could include; spouses, relatives and school personnel. Keep a current action plan with you **at all times** for use in an emergency.

Review your action plan with your health care provider at least once a year. Your action plan may need to be changed or updated. Changes in your personal best or baseline peak flow number or medications may mean your action plan also needs to be changed. If you have questions or concerns about your action plan, please discuss them with your health care provider.

Make your action plan work for you! Keep it available and keep it current!

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish Health. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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