

ASTHMA TELEHEALTH VISIT GUIDELINES

THEMES AND QUESTIONS FOR FIRST 3 VISITS

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DAILY & EMERGENCY ASTHMA ACTION PLAN

Recognizing asthma (is this asthma?)

How would you describe your child's breathing pattern? Have you ever been told your child has asthma? What worries you about your child's breathing?

Children with asthma should be able to do everything other kids do when the right steps are taken. If your child's breathing keeps her/him from running, playing, sleeping or attending school there are medications that can help. It is really helpful to have a written plan to know what to do every day, what to do if breathing is getting worse and what to do in an emergency. ("What To Do In an Asthma Episode")

Do you have an asthma action plan? Does the daycare or school have a copy, too? Has your child ever had a breathing emergency?

An asthma action plan tells you how to manage a breathing emergency at home or at school. We use a traffic light model to think about asthma care. On a good day you take your normal medicine to keep asthma controlled – that's a GREEN light for GO. You can go to school, play hard and do all the other things you enjoy doing. When you are having trouble breathing or coughing that's a YELLOW day for caution. Slow down and avoid asthma triggers. Your plan tells you how to increase your medication. Be alert for a worsening pattern. RED means STOP. Follow your plan and seek immediate help for urgent signs. You might need to call an ambulance.

Has your child taken a breathing test to see if their breathing is as good as it should be? This is called spirometry.

Your child can now receive a spirometry test at the clinic. Your child will take several big breaths and blow out their air through a computer to measure how much air they exhale and how well the air flows from the lungs. Many children grow used to not breathing well and don't complain even when asthma is bad. There are very effective and safe medications now to get breathing back to normal. This usually takes a few months. The breathing test can show just how much these control medications help.

Do you have medicines at home that you give to your child for breathing problems? Can you show these to me and tell me how you give them? What let's you know your child needs these medicines? How do you know if the medicine is working?

Tell me about other family members who have breathing problems.

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REDUCING ASTHMA TRIGGERS

Today we'll focus on reducing exposure to the things that make asthma worse. These are called triggers. Avoiding triggers often means less medication will be needed to keep from having trouble breathing and coughing. Most asthma attacks happen when several things go wrong at the same time. Having cold or flu and breathing strong fumes or smoke for example might trigger breathing problems. Removing triggers lessens the chance of having an attack.

Let's watch a short cartoon to learn more about triggers.

Eating lots of vegetables and fruits and washing your hands often can help you have fewer colds. Keeping up with vaccine schedules and getting the flu shot every fall lowers the risk of infections and asthma attacks.

Some of the worst asthma triggers are things in the air, both indoors and outside. These things can stay around a long time in carpets, cloth-covered furniture and drapes. Let's watch a cartoon together to see some important triggers. (Chris's World).

1. *What things in your house do you think might be making your child's asthma worse?*
2. *There is a free service to help you find and reduce asthma triggers at home. We can ask for someone to contact you to set up a time to visit and test your indoor air. They will also help you reduce triggers, too. (Asthma Bridge)*
3. *It really helps to know the things to which you are sensitive or allergic. Has your child been tested for allergy? We can do this by a skin test or blood test. The best approach for reducing triggers is to test for allergy and focus on those things first.*
4. *How often is your child around vaping or smoking? (Smoke, Fumes and Odors) Do you know about free counseling and nicotine replacement to help smokers stop? (Missouri QuitLine). Would you like for me to sign you up for help to quit smoking?*
5. *How often do you notice a damp or musty smell in your house? Too much moisture from water under the house and plumbing, roof, gutter or window leaks causes mold to grow and attracts cockroaches, mice and other insects. All of these can make asthma worse.*
6. *What kinds of animals do you have in your house? Do they move freely around your house? If allergic to these your child can have worsening asthma, especially if animals are allowed in the bedroom.*
7. *Which of these do you use indoors – sprays, air fresheners, candles, essential oils, incense or other fumes or strong odors? Are any of these in your child's bedroom? These things emit tiny particles that end up deep in the lungs and make asthma worse.*

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LEARNING MORE: AIMING FOR REMISSION

Today we are going to talk about how to get asthma to go away and stay away!

If you have asthma, how long do you think it will take for the control medication to stop the real problem – that’s airway irritation (inflammation) and restore healthy lungs?

Well, it is about 3 months - about the same length of time it takes for a broken bone to heal!

What should we do once your lung test is normal and there’s no breathing problems?

After 3 months of breathing the right medication into the lungs twice a day most children are ready to step down from 2 puffs twice a day to only one puff twice daily. Stopping suddenly is risky and often leads to a set-back. Taking asthma controllers only once a day is not very effective. After 12 hours there is little medicine left in the airways. So, taking 1 puff twice daily is a better way to step down your inhaler. Then after 3-6 months and a normal lung test you might be ready to stop your twice daily controller inhaler.

How will you know you no longer need a daily medication to control breathing problems?

What can you do to keep asthma from coming back?

If the things that irritate your lungs are still present, medication will be needed for many months or even years. So, remember to look for and remove all the triggers you can. When your lung test is normal and triggers are gone, less medicine will be needed. Remember, a normal lung test is the only way to know for sure that asthma is under control. Asthma is in “remission” when no medications are needed and the lung test is normal for years. Many children with asthma go into remission after taking the right medication in the right way IF triggers are gone.

What else can you do to breathe better and keep asthma from coming back?

Eat more vegetables and fruits. Use your lungs a lot by running, swimming, singing, dancing, playing a brass or wind instrument or whatever activity gets you taking big breaths. Have fun!

Often breathing problems are caused by more than just asthma. So when the breathing test is normal, but coughing or shortness of breath is still a problem we need to look for other reasons. The most common cause is a stuffy or congested nose. The problem can often be solved by using salt water to rinse and clear the nose as part of your daily shower or any time your nose is blocked. Sometimes you might need medicine for allergy or acid reflux, too.

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LEARNING MORE: AIMING FOR REMISSION

How is your nose today? Do this simple “nose check”. Push in on one side of your nose to block it. Now sniff. Switch sides and sniff again. Can you breathe easily through both sides of your nose?

If not, something is causing water to be trapped in the lining of your nose. You can use a special salt water rinse or spray to draw out extra water, making it easy to breathe again. The water must be 3% salt like ocean water. We call that “hypertonic”. You can safely make this using a recipe or salt packs. Use a nasal rinse bottle or Netti pot to gently fill one nostril while blowing air out the other side. Then switch sides and repeat. You can buy hypertonic mist that comes out of a can as a spray. Sniff this into each side of your nose whenever you are stuffy. This helps remove viruses, dust, pollen and other allergens. You might get over your colds much faster and need less allergy medicine.

What are the most common problems that go with asthma?

It’s allergies and acid reflux. Your asthma action plan will include steps to treat these problems. Both can make your nose stuffy and cause you to feel short of breath. Acid reflux can cause chest tightness or coughing. Sometimes this happens suddenly when you are lying down. Acid-reliever medicines that are antihistamines often work best for children with asthma. When using nose spray medications remember to open and clear your nose with hypertonic salt water before use. When your nose is open and dry you are ready for the medicine spray.