

# LEARN MORE BREATHE BETTER<sup>SM</sup>



## MONITORING YOUR ASTHMA

Monitoring your asthma on a regular basis is important to keeping your asthma under control.

Most people who have asthma should be able to gain control of it—and keep it under control for a lifetime.

Once your asthma is controlled, you should be able to do anything that someone without asthma can do—whether it's sleeping through the night, going on a hike, or playing in a soccer game. You should be able to live a normal, active life.

Happily, most people who have asthma can reach these goals by tracking their symptoms and taking these four actions:

1. **Work closely with your health care providers.** This may be a doctor, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, nurse, respiratory therapist, or asthma educator. Regular asthma check-ups with your health care provider will help you learn how to manage your asthma and keep it under control.
2. **Manage your medicines.** Learn which medicines to take, when to take them, and how to use them correctly. Then take all of your medicines just as your doctor recommends.
3. **Identify your asthma triggers.** The things that bring on your symptoms are called your asthma triggers. Avoid them when possible.
4. **Watch for changes in your asthma.** You need to know when an asthma attack is coming and what to do. Act quickly and follow your health care provider's instructions to help keep your asthma symptoms from getting worse.

## ASTHMA

### WITH GOOD ASTHMA CONTROL, YOU CAN:

- Be free from troublesome symptoms day and night:
  - ✓ No coughing or wheezing
  - ✓ No difficulty breathing or chest tightness
  - ✓ No waking up at night due to asthma
- Have the best possible lung function
- Participate fully in any activities of your choice
- Miss few or no school or work days because of asthma symptoms
- Have fewer or no urgent care visits or hospital stays for asthma
- Have few or no side effects from asthma medicines

For more information and resources on lung health, visit NHLBI's Learn More Breathe Better program at [nhlbi.nih.gov/BreatheBetter](https://nhlbi.nih.gov/BreatheBetter).



National Heart, Lung,  
and Blood Institute

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## TRACK YOUR SYMPTOMS

Keeping track of your symptoms whenever you have them will help you and your health care provider adjust your treatment over time.

The assessment tool below can help you monitor your asthma.

### Tool to Assess Asthma Control Therapy Assessment Questionnaire\* (ATAQ)

**Instructions:** Check 1 answer for each question and enter point value (0 or 1) in the box.

1. In the past 4 weeks, did you:	Enter score
a) Miss any work, school, or normal daily activity because of your asthma? <input type="checkbox"/> YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/> UNSURE (1)	<input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
b) Wake up at night because of asthma? <input type="checkbox"/> YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/> UNSURE (1)	<input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
c) Believe that your asthma was well controlled? <input type="checkbox"/> YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/> UNSURE (1)	<input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
2. Do you use an inhaler for quick relief from asthma symptoms? <input type="checkbox"/> YES (1) <input type="checkbox"/> NO (0) <input type="checkbox"/> UNSURE (1)	<input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
If yes, in the past 4 weeks, what was the highest number of puffs in 1 day you took of the inhaler?	
<input type="checkbox"/> 0 (0) <input type="checkbox"/> 9 to 12 puffs <sup>†</sup> (1)	<input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 to 4 puffs (0) <input type="checkbox"/> More than 12 puffs (1)	
<input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 8 puffs <sup>†</sup> (1)	
Add the numbers in the white boxes and enter the total score here.	<b>TOTAL</b> <input style="width: 100px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>

**If the score is 1 or greater, discuss the questionnaire with your health care provider.**

\*The control domain is 1 domain of the ATAQ instrument. Other disease management domains are included in the complete instrument.  
†This reflects a lower threshold than was used in the ATAQ validation studies to identify potential control problems. This modification was designed to encourage patients and providers to discuss how asthma medications are being used.

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## ANOTHER WAY TO MONITOR YOUR ASTHMA IS WITH A PEAK FLOW METER

A peak flow meter is a hand-held device that shows how well air moves out of your lungs.

Measuring your peak flow can help you:

- Know how well your asthma is controlled.
- Alert you to an oncoming asthma attack hours or even days before you feel symptoms.
- During an attack, it can help tell you how bad the attack is and if your medicine is working.

It also helps you and your health care provider:

- Learn what makes your asthma worse.
- Decide if your treatment plan is working well.
- Decide when to add or stop medicine.
- Decide when to seek emergency care.



## HOW TO USE A PEAK FLOW METER

Every morning when you wake up, before taking your asthma medicine, take your peak flow by following the steps below. Make this part of your daily routine. Check this number against the peak flow zones on your written asthma action plan. Use the zone that your peak flow is in to make treatment decisions. It's also a good idea to ask your doctor, pharmacist, or other health care professional to show you how to use your peak flow meter.

1. Always stand up. Remove any food or gum from your mouth.
2. Make sure the marker on the peak flow meter is at the bottom of the scale.
3. Breathe in slowly and deeply. Hold that breath.
4. Place mouthpiece on your tongue and close lips around it to form a tight seal (do not put tongue in the hole).
5. Blow out as hard and fast as possible.
6. Write down the number next to the marker. (If you cough or make a mistake, don't write down that number. Do it over again.)
7. Repeat steps 3 through 6 two more times.
8. Record the highest of these numbers in a notebook, calendar, or asthma diary.

## FIND YOUR PERSONAL BEST PEAK FLOW NUMBER

Your personal best peak flow number is the highest peak flow number you get over a 2-week period when your asthma is under good control—that is, when you feel good and have no symptoms.

To find your personal best peak flow number, take your peak flow readings:

- At least twice a day for 2 to 3 weeks
- When you wake up and in late afternoon or early evening
- 15–20 minutes after you take your quick-relief medicine
- Any other time your health care provider suggests

Write down the number you get for each peak flow reading. Your health care provider will use these numbers to determine your personal best peak flow and to create three peak flow zones. These zones are usually set up on your asthma action plan like a traffic light—in green, yellow, and red. What your health care provider tells you to do in each zone will help you know what to do when your peak flow number changes.

Ask your health care provider to write on your asthma action plan:

- The numbers for each of your peak flow zones. Mark the zones on your peak flow meter with colored tape or a marker.
- The medicines you should take while in each peak flow zone.
- The steps you should take while in each peak flow zone.



### Green Zone (Go)—

80 to 100 percent of your personal best—signals good control and no asthma symptoms. If you take daily long-term control medicines, keep taking them. And keep taking them even when you are in the yellow or red zones.



### Yellow Zone (Caution)—

50 to 79 percent of your personal best—signals caution: Your asthma is getting worse. Add quick-relief medicines, as spelled out in your written asthma plan. You might also need to increase other asthma medicines; ask your doctor.



### Red Zone (Medical Alert)—

less than 50 percent of your personal best—signals medical alert! Add or increase quick-relief medicines according to instructions in your written asthma action plan and call your doctor now.



Also, use your **peak flow meter**:

- When you're having asthma symptoms or an attack. First, take your medicine for the attack. Then take your peak flow. This will help you see if the medicine is working for you or if you need more treatment.
- Any other time your doctor suggests.