

THE  LUNG ASSOCIATION™

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY
THE ASTHMA HANDBOOK



When you have asthma, you need to know what to do in an emergency. Your asthma action plan will tell you exactly what to do when you start to have breathing problems. If you don't have a plan, ask your doctor for one.

If you start to have breathing problems, follow the instructions at the right. You may even want to make a copy of this page and post it somewhere handy.

What can I expect when I arrive at the hospital?

You will be given medications that will help open your airways so you can breathe easier. Hospital staff may ask you questions about your asthma, including how much rescue medication (blue puffer) you have taken on the way to the hospital.

In the emergency room:

- your pulse and blood pressure will be taken
- oxygen may be given using a mask
- an attachment may be placed on one of your fingers to measure the oxygen content of your blood
- an intravenous, or IV, may be started to give you medication that will open your airways

What happens after I go home from the emergency room?

Within 48-72 hours of visiting the emergency room, you should call your doctor for an appointment. You will need to review the reason why you ended up in the emergency room so that you can prevent it from happening again. Your doctor may want you to see a certified asthma educator or respiratory educator to help you regain control of your asthma.

If you have been given a prescription for additional or increased medication, be sure to tell your doctor about it. Ask how long you should take the additional medication before returning to your usual asthma medications.

IF YOU START TO HAVE BREATHING PROBLEMS:

- Stop all activity.
- If possible, remove yourself from exposure to the trigger.
- Sit in a relaxed position.
- Take your rescue medication (blue puffer).
- Repeat your rescue medication if you do not start to feel relief within 10 minutes.
- If you have come in contact with one of your allergy triggers, take a shower or bath when feeling better.

If you do not feel relief from your blue puffer, you need to take action RIGHT NOW.

SIGNS OF WORSENING ASTHMA:

- Breathing is very difficult
- Continued wheezing or coughing at rest
- Difficulty walking or talking
- Lips and/or fingernails are blue
- Blue puffer does not help in 10 minutes or does not last three hours

You need to call for help NOW. Ask another adult or neighbour to drive you to the nearest emergency room, or call an ambulance.

Use your blue puffer on the way to the hospital as much as needed.