

What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease that can make it hard to breathe. It affects your airways – your body’s inner tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs. Many things can set off asthma. Asthma triggers are different for each person.

When you have an asthma attack, your airways react to something allergic or irritating, and they get narrower. Less air flows through to your lungs, making it hard for you to breathe. Asthma attacks are not all the same. In some cases, the airways can close so much that your organs don’t get enough oxygen. In fact, some people can die from serious asthma attacks.

Who is at risk for asthma?

You are more likely to get asthma if:

- your parents have asthma
- you have allergies
- you have a skin allergy called eczema

You can get asthma at any age, but it often starts in childhood. Once you have asthma, it doesn’t go away, although you could get much better.

How does asthma affect our community?ⁱ

- Approximately 10 percent of adults and 8 percent of children in Oregon have asthma.
- The total cost of asthma hospitalizations in Oregon in 2007 was more than \$28 million.
- In Oregon, adult females are more likely to have asthma than adult males.
- African Americans, American Indian/Alaskan Natives and homosexual or bisexual individuals are especially affected by this disease. These groups are known to have high smoking rates.
- Oregonians without a college education, with lower incomes, or who are on Medicaid or the State Children’s Health Insurance Program are more likely to have asthma.

What is the recommended care for asthma?

Asthma is a serious condition, so receiving high-quality care is a must. To help control your asthma, you need to take the right medicine. To prevent asthma attacks, people with chronic asthma should be taking daily control medicine. Your doctor should talk with you about the best medicines to treat your asthma and stay healthy.

You can use *Partner for Quality Care* quality scores to compare how well Oregon doctors’ offices give recommended care at www.PartnerForQualityCare.org.

Common asthma triggers:

- ✓ Tobacco or wood smoke
- ✓ Polluted air
- ✓ Strong fumes
- ✓ Mold, dust or animal dander
- ✓ A cold, flu, sinusitis or bronchitis
- ✓ Cold, dry weather
- ✓ Emotional excitement or stress
- ✓ Physical exertion or exercise
- ✓ Heart burn or acid reflux
- ✓ Sulfites – something in certain foods and wine

High-quality care is **the care you need when you need it** – no less and no more. High-quality asthma care starts with having a doctor who respects you, communicates clearly with you, and involves you in decisions about your care. Quality care is care that works, care that is safe, and care that’s recommended for asthma:

STAGE OF ASTHMA CARE	YOUR DOCTOR SHOULD
Diagnosis & Every Visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Give you a physical exam. ✓ Check for wheezing and/or coughing. ✓ Check how often breathing problems happen. ✓ Prescribe medication(s). ✓ Make an action plan to manage your asthma. ✓ Give you flu/pneumonia shots as needed. ✓ Check for other problems (acid reflux, heart failure).
Ongoing Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make sure your blood pressure is less than 140/90. ✓ Check your asthma action plan progress. ✓ Discuss what you can do to avoid triggers. ✓ Teach you how to use peak flow meters, inhalers and medicines.
Flare-Ups, Worsening Symptoms and/or Acute Episodes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Prescribe fast-acting, inhaled medicine. ✓ Prescribe oral steroid when problems are not solved with inhaled medicines.

ⁱ *Source: Oregon Asthma Program. 2009. The Burden of Asthma in Oregon: 2008. Available online at www.oregon.gov/ph/asthma/docs/burden.pdf