

Patient Update

What is good asthma control?

When parents hear that their child has asthma, it can bring a lot of mixed emotions.

Most parents are quick to go out and buy air filters, humidifiers and encase bedding with dust mite proof covers, without even knowing what is actually triggering their child's asthma. There are a number of allergens that might be the cause of the outbreaks:

- Pollens
- Molds
- Animal dander
- House dust mite
- Cockroach droppings

Parents should educate themselves about asthma. Talking with their allergist/immunologist about asthma, and how they can effectively reduce or eliminate the effect asthma has on their child's health, is the best step toward understanding the disease.

As you prepare to teach your child about asthma, they need to take an open and honest approach. Whether your child is a toddler or teen with asthma, children at all ages will learn from experience and the consequences that come with failing to manage their asthma.

Tips for parents

Below are a few tips for teaching your children how to manage their asthma:

Toddlers

- Understand very little at this age but like to "play act" and can mimic treatment on a doll or stuffed toy
- Make treatment a pleasant time

Pre-schoolers

- Like colorful pictures
- Need to talk with parents about peak flow monitoring, symptoms and find words to describe their symptoms
- Preschoolers can assist with medications, but require very close supervision. Children at this age can understand they have lungs and use them to breathe. They realize what pets or other triggers bring on attacks, but will often still expose themselves to risks and triggers if given the option.

School-age children

- Respond well to pictures, videos, games, hands-on activities and group learning
- Can understand triggers
- Can do peak flow monitoring and take medications with supervision
- Can alert parents to early onset of asthma symptoms
- Need to be allowed to play and participate in sports with their peers

Pre-teens

- Respond best to peers and "peer idols," may not respond to formal education
- Need a general understanding of asthma and that the consequences are for failing to manage the disease
- Pre-teens require more independence in taking medication, peak flow monitoring and observing management plan. Parents should step back, but not ignore the issue.

Teens

- View treatment as infringing on their independence
- Teens fail to recognize the danger of poorly controlled asthma. Parental intervention may be necessary at times.
- Teens respond best to peers or "peer idols." Stress known personalities or celebrities who have asthma or encourage age involvement in teen support groups.
- May respond to "contracts," complete with rewards and consequences, which encourage compliance with asthma management programs

If you educate yourself and your child, living with asthma will seem less like a chore and more like a lifestyle.

