

ASTHMA:

Knowing Your Journey And The Course You Have To Take



Suzy Taylor, a 67-year old female, is active with her local running club despite having to manage her asthma. When she was first diagnosed with asthma, she tried to hide her symptoms from club members and she didn't always take her medication as she should. After having a life-threatening asthma attack, she decided to take charge of her condition instead of letting it control her life.

“I finally learned I had to respect asthma as much as I would an opponent,” she said later. As she found out, gaining control of asthma involves several steps:

(see reverse side)

Step 1: Learn

The word “asthma” comes from an ancient Greek word which means “breathe hard.” Asthma causes spasms in the breathing passages of your lungs, resulting in wheezing, coughing and difficulty breathing. This is usually the result of an allergic reaction or a particular sensitivity.

Asthma is a chronic condition, but you will have symptoms only when something irritates your airways. During an attack, the lining of the breathing passages becomes inflamed, mucus clogs them and the muscles around them tighten. These changes make it difficult to breathe.

Certain things (“triggers”) can set off an asthma attack and everyone’s triggers are unique. It’s important to identify your triggers so you can avoid or deal with them.

- You might find, like Suzy, that strenuous exercise sets off symptoms.
- You may be sensitive to pollen, tobacco smoke or dust.
- Something you eat, such as shellfish, may cause symptoms.
- Heartburn or reflux may cause a reaction.
- Even bad weather, such as a thunderstorm, might trigger your asthma.

Once she stopped hiding from her condition and figured out what triggered it, Suzy then had to learn how to control it.

Step 2: Be Prepared

- Talk to your Primary Care Physician (PCP) about your medical and family histories, and what symptoms you’re having.
- Have a physical, including lung testing such as a peak flow measurement and pulmonary function tests. Your PCP may order allergy testing as well.
- Read up on the asthma medications your doctor prescribes, which may include short-term inhalers for immediate relief and maintenance inhalers for more severe symptoms. Learn when to use each type.
- Get a flu shot every year and the pneumonia vaccine at regular intervals.
- Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.

Step 3: GO FOR IT! - Your Asthma Action Plan

Work with your PCP to come up with a customized Asthma Action Plan which you can post in your home. Learning about asthma, knowing your triggers and having an Action Plan can all help you to win against asthma!