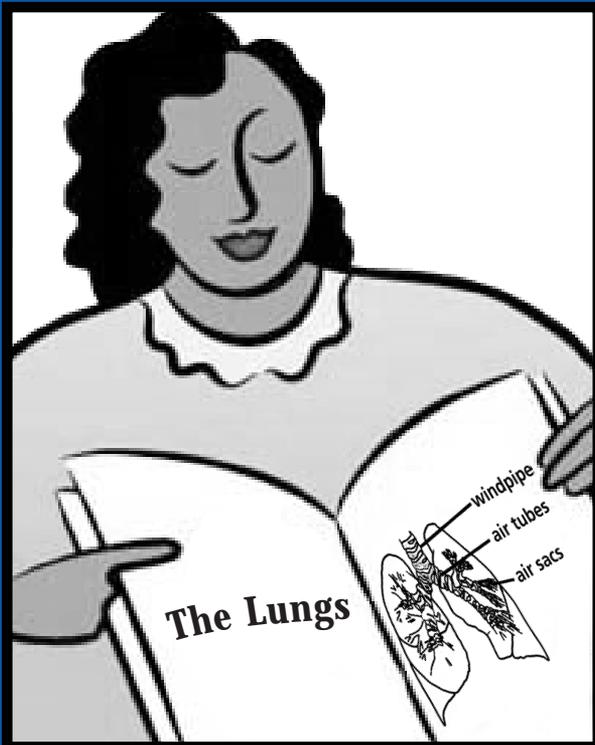


Key
Words
in
Plain
Language[®]



Read
Asthma

About CAP

Asthma is a problem in our community.

CAP, the Community Asthma Program, uses the motto:

Take Care Take Action.

CAP brings news and facts about asthma to people in the community and to the patients, doctors, and nurses of our community health centers.

This book was written to help us all talk about asthma.

Please share it with friends. It was written and developed by:

Jackie Rodriguez, M.Ed.

Yvette Valderrama

Pamela Surkan Sc.M.

Rima Rudd Sc.D.

Lawren Daltroy Dr.P.H.

With help from

Chris Fanta, M.D.

Kate Crowley

This book was designed by Suzi Wojdyslawski.

Many thanks to the doctors and nurses of Brookside Community Health Center, the teachers and students of the adult learning centers of English High School and Roxbury Community College, and the patients of the Asthma Clinic at Brigham and Women's Hospital who helped review this material and who offered advice for changes and improvement.

Plain Talk About

Asthma

Plain Talk About Asthma gives the everyday meaning of some medical words. Many of the words and phrases used by people are special to their work and may feel like another language to us. People in fields like medicine and law are now talking about using plain language that everyone can understand.

This little book explains words that doctors and nurses use when they talk about asthma. It also explains words that can be found in most patient education books and pamphlets about asthma.

This book is like an asthma dictionary. We hope it will help you when you talk to people with asthma. If you have asthma, this book may help you to better understand what you hear and read about asthma.



First we describe asthma. Then we list words in alphabetical order. These words are often found in asthma information books. We use plain language and give the common meaning for each of these words. At the end, we list these words in groups. The end of the book has space for new words and phrases.

Asthma

Key Words in Plain Language[®]



Table of Contents

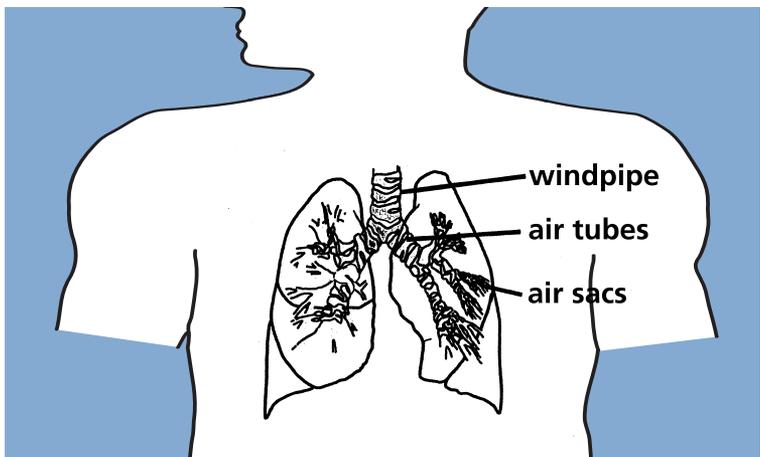
About Asthma	1
Take Care - Take Action	3
Definitions	6
Key Words	18
New Words	20

About Asthma

Asthma has been on the rise all over the world. We need to take action to help people control their asthma. We also need to learn how to prevent asthma.

Asthma is a disease of the lungs that cannot be cured. Diseases like asthma that are with us for a long time are called chronic diseases. Asthma, like many chronic diseases, cannot be cured but can be controlled.

To understand asthma, we first have to know some things about our breathing. The airways that move air through our lungs look like an upside down tree. When we breathe in, air flows into our nose and mouth, down our windpipe (trachea), through the air tubes (bronchi) and smaller airways, and into the air sacs (alveoli).



Asthma Has Two Parts

- When people have asthma, the airways swell. This swelling causes the airways to become narrow.
- Also, when people have asthma, mucus builds up in the airways.
- This swelling (chronic inflammation) and the mucus build-up that goes along with it get in the way of breathing. Medicines can make a difference.

Take Care - Take Action

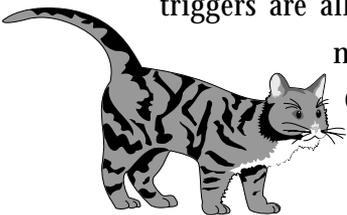
People with asthma learn how to control their asthma. It is important to reduce the swelling of the airways and control the build-up of mucus. It is also important to prevent asthma attacks. People with asthma can take care so that they are not limited in what they can do. There are 3 important action steps:

1. Reduce the swelling in the airways

People can breathe better and have fewer asthma attacks when the swelling is reduced. One kind of asthma medicine, called anti-inflammatory medicine, reduces the swelling in the airways caused by asthma. These medicines must be taken every day even if there are no symptoms of asthma. The medicines act to prevent problems before they begin. Some examples of anti-inflammatory medicines are inhaled steroids and Cromlyn. Common anti-inflammatory medications are Flovent or Vanceril.

2. Avoid asthma triggers

Asthma attacks often happen when people are exposed to things called triggers. Asthma triggers are different for different people. Some common asthma triggers are allergens like cigarette smoke, cats, mold, mildew, dust mites, roaches, or ragweed. Other common triggers are colds and flu, exercise, strong emotions, cold air, and changes in the weather.



People with asthma can often reduce asthma attacks if they can control the space they live in. For example, special pillow and mattress covers help control mites. Dust is reduced when people use washable curtains instead of blinds or drapes. Rules like no smoking or no pets in the bedroom help. Together, people can make changes in their building and in their community. For example, school children helped bring attention to the idling buses in their neighborhood. We can all help by making healthy changes in our buildings, schools, places of work, and in our community.

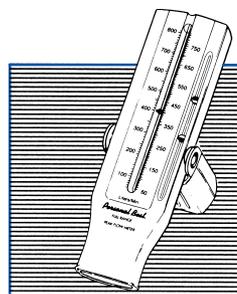


3. Treat asthma attacks

People learn how to prevent many asthma attacks. Sometimes they need medicine once they feel an attack coming on. Some medicines are just for asthma attacks and make a difference right away. These medicines help the muscles in the airway relax and are called bronchodilators. Some examples are Ventolin, Proventil, Maxair, Theophylline and Alupent.

WARNING SIGNS

We cannot feel our lungs. People with asthma often measure their breathing to find out how their lungs are working. An easy tool to use is called a peak flow meter.



The peak flow meter measures how fast air comes out of the lungs. People with asthma learn what speed is normal for them. Once they know what is normal for them, they can tell when their breathing is below normal. People who measure their breathing each day can often tell when they might have an asthma attack. They can take action to control the attack.

People with asthma will often have some symptoms before an asthma attack. Common warning signs are:

- Trouble breathing
- Coughing
- Tightness in the chest
- Tiredness
- A hard time sleeping

Definitions

A

- Acute** Quick and short term.
The flu is an acute illness because it goes away after a short time.
- Aggravate** To make worse.
A very rainy season aggravates my asthma because a lot of mold begins to grow when the weather is damp.
- Airways** The tubes that take air in from the nose and mouth to the lungs are your airways.
When Louis takes a deep breath, his airways move oxygen into his lungs.
- Allergen** Something like pollen or mold that can cause the body to develop a reaction like sneezing or a rash.
An allergen, like pollen, may set off an asthma attack for someone who has hay fever.
- Allergic** When the body reacts to something it is exposed to and develops symptoms of an allergy (like sneezing, sniffing, a rash, etc.)
Joe sneezes if a cat is nearby because he is allergic to cats.
- Allergist** A doctor who takes care of people with allergies.
Carla visits the allergist yearly for pollen and mold allergies.
- Allergy** An unusual reaction to certain things such as some kinds of food or cloth or pollen. Common signs of an allergy are headaches, itchiness and sneezing.
Yvette has an allergy to pollen and has itchy eyes in the fall.

Alveoli Millions of tiny air bags in the lungs. These bags fill up with air to move oxygen into the blood. The many alveoli in my lungs bring oxygen to the blood.

Anti-inflammatory

Something that reduces swelling. Common anti-inflammatory medications are Flovent or Vanceril.

Louis takes anti-inflammatory medications every day to help control his asthma.

Antibiotics Drugs used to kill or slow the growth of germs that cause disease. A germ is a simple living thing too small to be seen without a microscope. Some germs cause disease.

Joe took antibiotics to cure his strep throat.

Asthma A chronic, inflammatory disease of the airways of the lungs.

People with asthma always have inflammation in the airways.

Attack A sudden occurrence of an illness.

When Carla has an asthma attack, she has a hard time breathing.

B

Breath Air that goes in and out of the body through the nose and mouth.

Yvette fills her lungs with air when she takes a deep breath.

Breathe To take air in and out of the body.

Louis breathes through his nose unless he has a cold.

Breathing The act of taking air in and out of the lungs.

Joe's breathing changes if someone in the room is smoking.

Bronchial Tubes

The tubes letting air in and out of the lungs.
Can you find the bronchial tubes in the picture at the start of this book?

Bronchodilator

Medicine that opens up the bronchial tubes. The medicine lets more air through by relaxing the muscle around the tubes.

Bronchodilator medicine like Ventolin helps Carla breathe better when she has an asthma attack.

C

Chronic Lasting a long time.
Yvette has had a chronic cough for two years.

Chronic Disease

A disease that lasts for years.
A chronic disease like asthma has no cure, but it can be controlled.

Contract To make smaller and shorter.
The muscles around his airways contract when Louis has symptoms of asthma.

Control To manage.
You can control asthma by taking medications and staying away from asthma triggers.

COPD Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. Asthma, Emphysema and chronic bronchitis are all COPD.
Joe's grandfather was told he had COPD two years ago.

Corticosteroids

Medicine used to treat asthma, to reduce swelling of the airways (inflammation), and to prevent attacks.

Carla takes her corticosteroids to prevent asthma attacks.

Cough

To force air from the lungs with a sudden, short sound.

Yvette coughs when she walks in heavy traffic because of all the car exhaust.

Cure

To make completely better by getting rid of the illness, not just the symptoms.

Louis took antibiotics to cure his infection.

D

Dander

Flakes of skin shed by all animals. Many people are allergic to dander.

Cats can shed dander all over the house.

Dilate

To become larger or wider.

When Joe uses his asthma medicines, the airways in his lungs dilate and he can breathe better.

Dilator

Something that causes things to become larger or wider.

A bronchodilator is a dilator that opens up the airways in the lungs.

Disease

Illness, sickness.

Asthma is a disease of the lungs.

Dust

Fine dry earth that is like a powder. Dust is carried in the air.

Carla wipes the dust off the window sill before she opens the window.

E

Emphysema A lung disease. Air gets into the lung tissues and causes it to expand. There is not enough room to breathe properly.

Some people develop emphysema because they breathe in chemicals at work.

Environment

Where we live and spend our time. The inside environment is our home and place of work. The outside environment is our neighborhood.

The environment inside my home is free of things that can trigger asthma symptoms, but the traffic outside can be a problem.

Environmental Control

Action that improves the space we live in and the air we breathe.

Yvette took environmental control measures when she kept the cat out of the bedroom and asked people not to smoke in her house.

Episode

A brief time in which symptoms are worse.

People who are allergic to rag weed sometimes have more asthma episodes in the fall.

Exertion

Effort, work.

Some people have asthma symptoms after a time of strong exertion such as running very fast.

I

Immune

When your body can protect itself from a disease.

Most children are immune to measles now because of vaccines.

Immunity

The body's ability to keep from getting a disease.

Louis did not get the flu last winter because the vaccine gave him immunity.

Immunotherapy

A medical treatment that helps your body build up defenses and fight off disease.

People with very strong allergies can sometimes find relief through immunotherapy.

Infect

To spread a disease that is caused by a germ or virus.

People who handle food can easily infect others if they do not wash their hands and wear gloves.

Infection

A disease that is caused by germs or viruses.

Joe's young children get lots of infections because colds and viruses spread easily in school.

Inflame

Make hot, red or swollen.

When Carla's daughter touches a cat, her face becomes inflamed.

Inflammation

When part of the body is red, hot, or swollen.

Asthma medicine can reduce the inflammation of the airways.

Inhale

To breathe in.

If you are in a room with someone who is smoking, you will inhale the smoke too.

Inhaler

A small tool people can use to help them breathe in special medicine.

Yvette's inhaler brings medicine to her lungs and reduces swelling.

Irritants

Something that can cause soreness or sensitivity (an inflammatory reaction).

The smell of some chemicals like chlorine bleach are irritants for the airways of our body.

L

Lung Function

A measure of how strong the lungs are.

Louis uses a peak flow meter to check his lung function every day.

Lungs

Balloon-like organs in your chest used for breathing. When we breathe in, our lungs bring oxygen to the blood.

M

Medication A medicine or drug.

Carla gets her medication for asthma at the drug store.

Medicine

A drug used to take care of an injury or disease. Doctors prescribe medicine for people who are sick.

Mild

Very slight and small. You can barely hear a mild cough.

Mildew

Tiny plants (fungus) that grow in damp warm areas. It looks like fuzz. Damp weather causes mildew and mold to grow.

Mites

Tiny animals that look like spiders. Mites cannot be seen by the eye. They often live on clothing and in bed sheets. Mites are so small, they live on a speck of dust.

Moderate

Medium symptoms. When Yvette has moderate symptoms, she takes time to relax.

Mold

Tiny plant (fungus) that grows on food and damp surfaces. It is furry looking. You can often see spots of mold around the edge of the bathtub.

Mucus A slimy fluid that coats and protects the inside of the nose, mouth, bronchial tubes and other parts of the body.
You blow mucus out of your nose when you have a cold.

Muscle contraction

When a muscle tightens up.
When Yvette has a muscle contraction, the muscles around her airways tighten up and air cannot pass through.

N

Nebulizer A machine that turns asthma medicine into mist. This mist is easy to breathe in.
Louis has a nebulizer at home in case his son has an asthma attack.

P

Peak flow A measure of the fastest speed with which you can blow air out from your lungs.
A high peak flow value means you are breathing well.

Peak flow meter

A small tool used to measure how fast you can blow air out of your lungs.
Joe uses his peak flow meter at home to manage his asthma better.

Persistent There all the time.
This persistent cough will not go away.

Pollen Yellow powder released from a flower.
Carla is allergic to pollen in the spring.

Prescription

The written directions the doctor gives you to tell the pharmacist what type of medicine you need, how much, and how often to take it.

Yvette took her Azmacort prescription to the drug store.

Prevent

To keep from happening or to stop something before it happens.

Louis can help prevent an asthma attack by staying away from cats and mold or mildew.

Puff

A short, gentle burst of air or medication.

Joe took a puff of asthma medicine from his inhaler.

Pulmonary Care Unit

Section of the hospital where people with lung problems get care.

Carla goes to the pulmonary care unit to see her doctor about asthma.

Pulmonologist

A doctor who takes care of people with lung disease.

Yvette has to see her pulmonologist every three months for asthma checkups.

R

Regular

Usual, normal.

Louis has regular medication he takes every day and special medication for sudden attacks.

Relief

Ease or lessening from pain or discomfort.

The medicine provided a relief and Joe began to feel better.

Relieve

To ease.

The medicine relieves Carla's asthma, and then she feels better.

Respiration Breathing.
When you have an asthma attack respiration is hard.

Respiratory Therapist
Someone licensed to work with people who need to improve their breathing.
Yvette sees a respiratory therapist to help her monitor her lung function.

S

Severe Very strong and very serious.
You may have to stay in bed for a severe illness.

Shortness of breath
A problem that happens when people cannot take in or let out enough air.
Louis gets shortness of breath when he climbs stairs.

Side effect An unwanted reaction to a medicine.
Some medicine can cause side effects like being tired.

Sign Something that others (especially doctors) can see about you that shows illness.
Trouble breathing can be a sign of asthma.

Soreness A feeling of pain in an area of the body.
Louis had soreness in his muscles after he ran a marathon.

Spasm Sudden, strong muscle tightening.
Carla sometimes gets a muscle spasm in her back if she lifts heavy things.

Spirometer A machine used to measure the air that moves in and out of the lungs.
Nurses in asthma clinics use the spirometer to measure lung function of asthma patients.

Steroids Powerful drugs that reduce inflammation.
Steroids are a group of chemicals called hormones normally made by the body. Steroids used in asthma are different than muscle-building steroids.
Louis takes a special kind of steroid to reduce the swelling in his lungs.

Swelling An increase in size.
We could all see the swelling in his arm when he was stung by a bee. We cannot see or feel the swelling in the lungs caused by asthma.

Symptom A feeling of illness that you notice.
Trouble breathing can be a symptom of asthma.

T

Temporary Short lived. Only around for a short time.
Joe's trouble breathing was only temporary.
Once the smoker put out the cigarette, it was OK.

Therapy Treatment to take care of a sickness or injury.
Carla ate chicken soup as a therapy for her cold.

Treat To give medical care.
The doctor treats me with medicine.

Treatment Action or medicine used to take care of sickness or injury.
The treatment the nurse gave me helped me get better.

Trigger Something that can bring on symptoms of asthma. Examples include exercise, colds, and allergens.
Cold air can trigger an asthma attack.

U

Upper respiratory system

The parts of the head and neck used for breathing: the nose, throat (pharynx), and windpipe (trachea).

Louis had problems with his upper respiratory system last winter. Many people at work were sick and Louis got lots of colds.

W

Warning sign

Signals from the body that your asthma is getting worse.

Shortness of breath is a warning sign of an asthma attack.

Wheeze

To breathe with difficulty making a whistling sound. People usually wheeze when they have chest tightness.

When Yvette wheezes people can hear her breathing.

Key Words

This section groups words about asthma. These groupings bring together words that are often used together and that are related in some way.

Words about illness and disease

Asthma	Chronic
COPD	Disease
Immune	Immunity
Immunotherapy	Infect
Infection	Emphysema

Words about signs of illness and disease

Attack	Episode
Sign, Warning sign	Soreness
Shortness of breath	Symptom

Words that describe symptoms

Acute	Mild
Moderate	Persistent
Regular	Severe
Temporary	

Words about treating illness and disease

Aggravate	Cure
Control	Medicine, Medication
Prevent	Pulmonary Care Unit
Relieve, Relief	Side Effect
Treat, Treatment	Therapy

Words about drugs and medicines

Anti-inflammatory	Antibiotics
Bronchodilator	Corticosteroids
Dilator	Inhaler
Prescription	Steroid

Words about allergies

Allergen	Allergic
Allergy	Irritant
Trigger	

Words about allergens	Dander Environment Mildew Mold	Dust Environmental control Mites Pollen
Words about breathing	Airways Breath Breathing Cough Inhale Mucus Puff Respiratory system Wheeze	Alveolus or alveoli Breathe Bronchial tubes Exertion Lungs Peak flow Respiration Upper respiratory
Words about what asthma does to the airways	Contract Inflate, Inflamed Muscle Contraction Swelling	Dilate Inflammatory Spasm
People who take care of people with asthma	Allergist Pulmonologist	Pulmonary Specialist Respiratory therapist
Asthma Tests and Machines	Lung Function Nebulizer Spirometer	Lung Function Test Peak Flow Meter Spirometry

Telephone Numbers



Nearest Hospital to Home:

Phone number: _____

Nearest Health Center:

Phone number: _____

Name of Regular Doctor or Nurse:

Phone number: _____

In case of emergency call 911.

Medicine for every day use:

Medicine for asthma attacks:

