

Managing Asthma™

Spring 2022



Making the Most of Asthma Medical Visits

If you've been newly diagnosed with asthma, those first visits with your doctor are key to helping you better understand your condition and to creating an action plan moving forward. They are also an important opportunity to establish a good relationship with your provider where you can effectively communicate.

Because asthma affects each person differently, it is important that you and your doctor work together to create a personalized plan for you. This means that you need to be able to provide your doctor with as much information as possible. The following are some notes you should make about your condition to prepare for your visit:

- Describe how you have been feeling.
- What triggers have you noticed?
- How have you been treating flare-ups?
- How effective have treatments been at relieving your symptoms?
- What happens before, during, and after a flare-up? Be sure to jot down specifics like whether you were indoors or outdoors as well as the weather conditions at the time.

Other information to bring to an appointment:

- Names of medications, including any purchased over the counter
- Names of herbs and supplements you take regularly
- Any side effects from asthma medicines
- Peak flow readings

SPEAKING UP

Visits with your doctor are also your opportunity to ask questions about your condition while learning how to best manage your symptoms. Before the appointment, write out your questions, so you're sure to get the answers you need. Some examples include:

- How do I properly use my medications?
- What exercises would be beneficial for my asthma?
- What are the early signs of a flare-up?

Some offices have a nurse or other healthcare educator on staff to teach new asthma patients about their condition as well as how to avoid triggers and prevent major flare-ups.

Remember, you are your own best advocate. To establish open communication and make the most of your medical visits, speak up with any questions or requests for more detailed explanations from your doctor.

References:

"Making Your Asthma Medical Visits More Productive." *Making Your Asthma Medical Visits More Productive* | American Lung Association, <https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/asthma/living-with-asthma/managing-asthma/making-your-medical-visits>.

"Making the Most of Your Doctor Visit." *The Asthma & Allergy Center*, 9 Apr. 2014, <https://www.asthmaandallergycenter.com/article/making-the-most-of-your-doctor-visit/>.



Cleaning and Disinfecting Your Home with Asthma

For those with asthma, the presence of dirt, dust, and germs can create a particularly unhealthy environment. While cleaning once a week can minimize triggers, the process of cleaning and the products used can sometimes do more harm than good.

So, what's the best way to safely clean? Try these helpful tips:

USE CAUTION WHEN VACUUMING AND DUSTING

Cleaning can stir up dust mites, animal dander, and even mold. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) recommends that individuals with asthma use a damp cloth or a certified asthma and allergy friendly cloth when cleaning. It is also recommended that a vacuum with a certified high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filtration system be used.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CLEANING, DISINFECTING, AND SANITIZING SURFACES

- Cleaning removes dirt and germs
- Sanitizing reduces the number of germs
- Disinfecting kills germs

Remember, not all cleaning products can accomplish all three goals, nor are all cleaning products safe for people with asthma.

KNOW WHICH CLEANING PRODUCTS ARE SAFE FOR YOU

Products to use:

- Hydrogen peroxide less than 3%
- Ethanol
- Liquid/gel cleaners
- Unscented products
- Baking soda
- Vinegar
- Borax
- Dish soap

Products to avoid:

- Peroxyacetic acid
- Peracetic acid
- Essential oils—the scents could act as a trigger
- Spray cleaners, which can disperse chemicals into the air making it more likely you could breathe them in

When cleaning, wear gloves and eye protection to avoid contact with cleaning products.

While you may think that hot water is necessary to disinfect, the steam vapors could act as a potential trigger. Agencies recommend using room temperature water unless product instructions state otherwise.

Whenever possible increase airflow when cleaning, by opening windows or turning on fans.

Finally, bathe and change clothes after using products.

Any time you experience a flare-up, stop cleaning and follow your asthma action plan or call your doctor.

References:

EPA, Environmental Protection Agency, <https://www.epa.gov/coronavirus/how-can-members-my-household-use-disinfectants-properly-control-covid-19-if-family>.

"People with Moderate to Severe Asthma." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/asthma.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fasthma.html.

Services, AAFA Community. "Cleaning When You Have Asthma: The Dirty Truth." Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, <https://community.aafa.org/blog/cleaning-when-you-have-asthma-the-dirty-truth>.

Dealing with Grief and Loss During COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we deal with loss and the ongoing process of honoring those who have passed. Safety measures have prohibited family members from being at hospital bedsides and funerals and end-of-life religious services have been disrupted. These precautions have prevented people from sharing the comfort of close contact and the heartfelt expression of condolences. All of these experiences have had an impact on how we experience and process grief in this difficult time.

While COVID-19 has limited our social circles and outlets—common sources of support and normalcy during a time of grief—what hasn't changed are the physical and emotional responses common during the grieving process such as:

- Shock
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Disbelief/denial
- Distress
- Sadness
- Changes in sleep/loss of appetite
- Signs of grief in children and teens may also include changes in academic performance, social withdraw, increased frequency in the use of electronic devices, and extreme changes in behavior.

That being said, there are still ways to express grief and seek social support in the current climate. Mental health professionals recommend that those experiencing grief adjust their expectations by embracing technology as a tool to connect with others after a loss. The following are some suggestions for connecting with friends and family during a difficult time.



- Host family conference calls or group video chats. It's not the same as being together in person, but shared conversations encourage stronger connections.
- Post pictures on social media platforms. To protect the family's privacy, create a private group and send invitations to relatives and friends. Encourage members to share their photos.
- Arrange an act of memorial that can be done individually or virtually. Examples include planting a tree in the deceased's honor, donating to a charity of choice, or doing a specific activity that was meaningful to the person. This memorial can happen on a specific date or as people choose.
- Assemble a memory book or webpage in honor of the lost family member.
- Engage in activities that bring peace. Meditative hobbies like art, writing, gardening, or even playing creative games with children often bring a sense of calm and happiness.
- To help kids cope with their emotions, psychologists advise parents talk with children about missing their family member. Ask age-appropriate questions about how they feel, and, teach self-calming methods, like breathing or meditation exercises.

If you or a family member continues to struggle with the death of a loved one, contact your primary care doctor or school administrators for referrals to grief counselors.

References:

"Grief and Loss." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 22 July 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/grief-loss/index.html>.

"Helping Patients Cope with COVID-19 Grief." Monitor on Psychology, American Psychological Association, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/06/ce-covid-grief>.

1. Part of helping you live the healthiest life possible is protecting you from sickness and disease when possible. The COVID-19 vaccine is covered 100% on all SelectHealth® plans. Please visit selecthealth.org/who-we-are/covid-19-coverage if you have any questions about COVID-19 coverage information.
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