

What Do You Do During an Asthma Attack?

Common Symptoms of an Asthma Attack

Coughing • Chest pain or tightness • Shortness of or gasping for breath •
Wheezing • Flushed, pale, ashen or bluish looking skin •
Speaking in clipped or short bursts of speech

1. Have the person **STOP** whatever activity he/she is doing.
 - Send another person to get help. **DO NOT** leave the person alone.
2. Follow the person's Asthma Action Plan or emergency plan if there is one.
3. If the individual has a **QUICK-RELIEF INHALER** or **NEBULIZER** (with medicines such as albuterol, proventil, ventolin, proair, relion, or xopenex), have him/her **USE IT IMMEDIATELY!**

Generally, during an asthma attack an individual should:

- **Prepare inhaler for use by shaking canister for several seconds.** The person should exhale or empty all air out of lungs, and follow as listed below with or without a spacer:
 - **Inhaler With a Spacer or Holding Chamber:** Place spacer with inhaler in mouth (lips and teeth around opening) Inhale 1 puff of medication by depressing the canister once, breathe in slowly and deeply, **hold breath for 10 seconds** and then exhale.
 - **Inhaler Without a Spacer or Holding Chamber:** Place inhaler at the opening of the lips or a distance of 1 inch from open mouth; depress canister 1 time and inhale medicine quickly and deeply at the same time; **hold breath for 10 seconds** and then exhale.
- **Wait 30 seconds to 1 minute** between puffs of inhaled medication.
- **Shake medication canister for several seconds between puffs.**
- **Repeat process**, depress canister and inhale another puff, **hold breath for 10 seconds** and exhale.
- Continue as needed, typically 4 to 8 puffs (depending on severity of symptoms and what is outlined in your Asthma Action Plan).
- ❖ Give sips of room temperature water.
- ❖ Have the individual sit up and slowly breathe in through the nose and out through pursed lips (pursed lip breathing). **Pursed lip breathing technique** is:

- Start by sitting comfortably in a chair. Do not lie down.
- Relax your shoulders and neck. Concentrate on not gasping for air as you drop your shoulders.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose. Concentrate.
- Purse your lips together tightly as if trying to whistle, and blow out slowly through your mouth. Take as much time as possible to exhale in this way.
- Relax. Keep using the pursed-lip breathing until the breathless feeling goes away. Rest between breaths if you feel dizzy.

4. REPEAT above steps if **SYMPTOMS CONTINUE**.

5. IF SYMPTOMS CONTINUE OR WORSEN SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL HELP.

- **Quick-Relief Inhaled Medications such as Albuterol and Xopenex should provide relief of asthma symptoms (wheezing or coughing) within 5 to 10 minutes of use with a peak effect of medication around 90 minutes.**
- ****Per National Asthma Treatment Guidelines** (NHLBI: EPR3) for “**Home**” management of **asthma attacks** – Up to **two** treatments (either nebulizer or inhaler) **20 minutes apart** may be administered, assessing condition throughout both treatments to determine if emergency transport/emergency department treatment is necessary.

CALL 911 IF:

- **YOU** are not sure what to do – *OR*
- Rescue medications are not working (symptoms are getting worse, not better) or, meds are unavailable – *OR*
- The person’s lips or fingernails are **BLUE** – *OR*
- The individual is having difficulty talking, walking, or drinking liquids – *OR*
- The person’s nostrils are flaring out – *OR*
- You see neck, throat or chest muscle retractions (chest muscles sucking in to breathe)– *OR*
- The person is in obvious distress, there is a change in level of consciousness, *OR* the individual is showing signs of confusion – *OR*
- The individual’s condition is deteriorating.