



Asthma

After-Care Instructions

General Information

Asthma is a condition of inflammation (swelling) of the small airways in the lungs, which results in spasm and extra mucus. Your symptoms may include coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and difficulty in breathing. These symptoms may come and go, but the condition is chronic (ongoing) and may need regular, long-term treatment. Ongoing treatment decreases symptoms and may help you avoid emergency visits.

How to care for yourself when you leave the Emergency Department

- Follow up with the asthma care manager at your facility who can help you get your asthma under better control.
- Increase your fluid intake to as much as eight glasses of water per day.
- Take your medications as directed.
 - ✓ Use your *preventer* (*controller*) anti-inflammatory medication regularly (a corticosteroid inhaler like Azmacort™, Flovent™, Pulmicort™).
 - ✓ Use your *reliever* or *rescue* medication (like Albuterol™) regularly during a flare-up of your asthma, and then use as needed to relieve your symptoms.

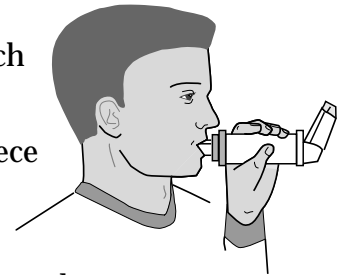
- Use a spacer such as an Aerochamber with your inhalers to increase medication effectiveness.

- To use the inhaler correctly:

1) Shake the inhaler well and insert into the spacer device.

2) Breathe out as much as possible

3) Place the mouthpiece of the spacer into your mouth.



4) Press down on the medication canister (releasing one puff of medicine).

5) Breathe in **slowly** and **deeply**. Fill your lungs with as much air as possible.

6) Hold your breath and count to ten.

7) Breathe out.

- If you smoke, consider getting help to quit. Avoid second-hand smoke. Call the health education center at your local facility for information on how to quit.
- Avoid other asthma triggers such as dust, animal hair, and mold.

When to call Kaiser Permanente

- If your peak flow drops to 50% of your personal best. (This is the red zone of the symptom scale.)

- If your asthma symptoms do not respond to your usual treatment or if the symptoms are severe or are getting worse.
- If the skin is sucking in below your chest, between the ribs, or the base of the neck.
- If you are having symptoms more than twice a week and using a *rescue* or *reliever* medication (Albuterol™ or Ventolin™) without a corticosteroid (a *preventer* or *controller*) inhaler.
- If you are using your *rescue* or *reliever* a few times a day or more and don't feel better.

How to prevent future asthma flare-ups

- If you smoke, consider getting help to quit. Avoid second-hand smoke.
- Control any triggers for your asthma flare-ups, such as dust, allergies, or pets.
- Attend one of Kaiser Permanente's asthma classes.
- Get a flu shot each fall.
- Work with your doctor, nurse practitioner or care manager to get a written self-management plan you can follow. Be sure you know how to treat asthma symptoms early or if you become ill.

When to return to an Emergency Department

- If you have difficulty walking or talking due to shortness of breath.
- If you have severe symptoms.
- If you are breathing rapidly and are unable to catch your breath (struggling to breathe).
- If there is a high-pitched noise or wheezing sound when breathing in as well as out.

Other instructions (if needed):

If you think you have an emergency medical condition and you cannot safely go to a Plan hospital, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

For information on this and over 180 other health topics, see your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise® Handbook*. If you need a copy, please call 1-800-464-4000.

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