



St. Vincent Physician Network

Three Key Steps for Managing Your Child's Asthma

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Asthma is the most common chronic childhood disease, affecting nearly 5 million children in the United States. If your child is diagnosed with asthma, there are several important steps you need to take to properly manage and control the disease, according to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI).

"When a child has asthma, uncontrolled symptoms such as coughing, chest tightness, shortness of breath and wheezing, can affect many school and extracurricular activities. However, just because asthma is an ongoing disease does not mean your child has to suffer on an ongoing basis. With the proper management and medications, an asthmatic child can lead a normal life," said Ricardo Bemales, M.D.

If your child is diagnosed with asthma, there are three important things to remember:

1. Provide an allergen-free home environment

Even if asthma symptoms are not always present in an asthmatic child, an asthma attack is always a possibility. Exposure to *allergens*—*any* substance that can trigger an allergy can also trigger asthma symptoms.

Common allergens include:

- Animal fur or dander (tiny skin flakes and saliva), all animals with fur, even short fur, have this.
- Pollen from leaves or weeds
- Mold
- Cockroaches
- Cigarette smoke
- Household dust
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"Staying away from, or getting rid of, the allergens will help," Bemales said. "Since children with asthma have inflamed airways, which can become even more inflamed after they are around these allergens or triggers, it's also important for them to take their medicine on an ongoing basis to reduce this inflammation. Some of these medications should be used on a daily basis as instructed, even if your child is feeling well. This is to prevent asthma flare-ups and make sure that airways are as open as possible."

2. Exercise is important

Parents may want to restrict their asthmatic child's physical activity to prevent wheezing. But once a child is taking proper medications, aerobic exercise needs to become part of his or her daily activities. Regular exercise improves airway function and is good for a child's physical health and emotional well being.

With proper medication and treatment, asthmatic children can participate in any sport, though some activities are considered better for children with asthma. Sports with some periods of activity are less

likely to cause asthma symptoms, because they allow you to regain control of your breathing. These activities include:

- Baseball and softball
- Volleyball
- Tennis
- Walking, hiking or leisure biking
- Golf
- Some track and field events
- Swimming

3. See a doctor on a regular basis

Since asthma is an ongoing disease, it requires ongoing management and treatment. Even if your child is feeling better, it's important that he or she continues to follow an asthma management and treatment plan, with the help of a physician.

Well-managed asthma also includes using the proper medications. Some of these medications should be used on a daily basis as instructed, even if you are feeling well. This is to prevent asthma flare-ups and to ensure that airways are as open as possible. Make sure you follow your physician's instruction on how to use the prescribed medications.

The better informed you are about your child's asthma triggers and management, the less asthma symptoms will interfere with their activities. It is important for them to avoid their triggers, work with a physician on a management plan, and take appropriate medications as prescribed.

Together, you and your allergist can work to ensure that asthma does not interfere with your child's quality of life.

The AAAAI is the largest professional medical specialty organization in the United States representing allergists, asthma specialists, clinical immunologists, allied health professionals and others with a special interest in the research and treatment of allergic disease. Established in 1943, the Academy has more than 6,000 members in the United States, Canada and 60 other countries.