



Asthma Glossary

Allergen: A substance that the body registers as dangerous, causing an allergic reaction. Some common allergens are: pollen, mold, certain kinds of food, and animal dander.

Allergy: An abnormal reaction in the body to a substance (allergen) that causes the release of histamine or histamine-like substances. This can cause allergy symptoms, such as itchy eyes, runny nose, wheezing, and skin rashes.

Airways: The tubes in the lungs through which air flows in and out.

Anti-inflammatory: A type of medicine that reduces inflammation of the airways.

Asthma: A condition in which the airways become inflamed, swollen and narrow, therefore allowing less air to travel to and from the lungs. An asthma attack happens when asthma symptoms get worse.

Beta 2-agonists: A type of bronchodilator medication that works to relax the muscles surrounding the airways in order to keep the airways open.

Breathing rate: The number of breaths per minute.

Bronchial tubes: Airways in the lungs.

Bronchoconstriction: The constriction of the airways in the lungs due to the tightening of the surrounding muscle.

Bronchioles: The small, thin-walled branches of the airways in the lungs.

Bronchodilator: A medicine that opens the airways in the lungs.

Bronchospasm: The tightening of the muscle that surround the airways, causing the airways to narrow and making it difficult to breathe.

Combination inhaler: An everyday controller medicine that has a steroid and a long-acting beta-agonist.

Controller (maintenance) medicine: A medicine that is intended for long-term use and should be taken every day to control asthma symptoms.

Chronic disease: A disease that is long lasting or recurrent. Many chronic diseases can be controlled but not cured.

Corticosteroid: Also called a "steroid." A medicine that reduces swelling. An inhaled corticosteroid is an everyday controller medicine that reduces airway inflammation.

Dander: Tiny scales shed from animal skin or hair. Pet dander is a common allergen.

Dry powder inhaler (DPI): A device that delivers asthma medicine as a dry powder that can be breathed in.

Dust mites: Microscopic insects found in carpets, bedding, stuffed animals, upholstered furniture, and other soft materials. They are one of the most common asthma triggers.

Asthma Glossary

page 2 of 3

Exercise-induced asthma: A type of asthma that is made worse from physical activity.

Healthcare professional (or provider): A nurse, doctor, or other member of a healthcare team.

High-efficiency particulate air filter (HEPA): A type of high-efficiency air filter that removes airborne particles by forcing it through tight fibers.

Histamine: A naturally occurring substance in the body that causes an inflammatory response in the body. This can lead to allergic reactions, such as red or itchy eyes, and a tightening of the airways in the lungs.

Inflammation: A response in the body that includes swelling and redness.

Inhaler: A hand-held portable device that delivers asthma medication to the lungs.

Irritant: Anything that bothers the lungs, such as cigarette smoke or air pollution. Irritants may cause asthma symptoms.

Leukotriene modifier: An everyday controller medicine that works by blocking chemicals called “leukotrienes” in the body. Leukotrienes have been known to cause swelling in the airways.

Mast cell stabilizer: A medicine that helps stop mast cells from releasing chemicals that cause swelling. Mast cells are found in the airways and other parts of the body.

Metered-dose inhaler (MDI): A device that provides a measured amount of asthma medicine into the lungs.

Mold: A fungus found in damp areas such as basements, bathrooms, and leaf piles. Mold is a common trigger for allergies.

Mucus: A thick material produced by glands in the airways, nose, and sinuses. Mucus can form in the airways and limit the airflow making it difficult to breathe.

Nebulizer: A device that turns liquid medicine into a mist that a person can breathe into their lungs.

Oxygen: The essential element in the respiration process to sustain life. This colorless, odorless gas makes up about 21 percent of the air.

Oral medications: Medicines in pill, capsule or liquid form taken by mouth.

Peak flow rate: How fast air moves out of a person’s lungs when they breathe out hard. A device called a “peak flow meter” is used to measure the peak flow rate.

Peak flow meter: A small hand-held device that measures how fast air moves out of the lungs when a person breathes.

Personal best peak expiratory flow: The highest peak flow rate (PEF) a person can achieve when their asthma is under solid control. Note: This rate will change as the child grows as it is based on the child’s height.

Asthma Glossary

page 3 of 3

Pollen: Fine, powdery, yellowish grains or spores released by plants and trees. This is a common allergen.

Puffer: Another word for an inhaler or metered dose inhaler (MDI).

Pulmonary function tests (PFTs): A group of tests that measure how well the lungs take in and release air. Also referred to as lung function tests.

Quick-relief (rescue) medicine: Medicine used to treat asthma symptoms or asthma attacks. They are not meant to be used as everyday controller (maintenance) medicines.

Spacer: A plastic chamber that attaches to an inhaler, which makes it easier to get the right amount of medicine from a metered-dose inhaler (MDI) into the lungs.

Steroid: See corticosteroid.

Symptom: A sign or indication of a disease or disorder. In the case of asthma, symptoms may include shortness of breath, wheezing, and coughing.

Spirometry: A test that uses a device called a “spirometer” to measure the amount of air a person can blow from their lungs after taking a deep breath.

Theophylline: A long-term control medication that is taken by mouth that opens the airways to relieve and prevent bronchospasm.

Trigger: Anything that causes, or “triggers,” asthma symptoms.

Wheezing: The high-pitched whistling sound of air moving through narrowed airways.