Asthma is a chronic lung disease that causes your lungs to inflame and narrows your airways. It’s considered a chronic lung disease because it’s incurable and persists for a long period of time or constantly reoccurs.

The ongoing inflammation that occurs with asthma makes your airways very sensitive to some things you breathe in, or triggers. Triggers include many things, such as bacteria, dust, tobacco smoke and strong odors. The immune system of someone with asthma overreacts to these triggers by releasing chemicals and cells that cause changes, making the airways even smaller.

If not treated, asthma can lead to permanent lung scarring and narrowing of the airways. This can limit your ability to do some everyday activities. Flare-ups, or attacks, can put you in the hospital.

Managing asthma

Good asthma management is essential for getting asthma under control. One of the best steps you can take to prevent asthma attacks is to take your long-term controller, or “maintenance” medication, as directed by your doctor. You can lower your number of asthma attacks and keep your lungs healthier.

A rescue inhaler (such as Albuterol) can often treat attacks. You may be able to avoid attacks with a long-term controller inhaler, which lowers the risk for severe attacks that may need emergency care. Asthma has the potential to cause permanent lung damage. Irreversible damage usually occurs slowly over a long period of time.

Treating asthma attacks with a rescue inhaler but not taking your maintenance medication will still increase your risk of permanent lung damage.
**Maintenance medications** are taken daily no matter how severe your current symptoms are. These maintenance medications help you control your symptoms over a long period by reducing the incidence of asthma attacks. Examples are Flovent, Pulmicort, Aerobid, Alvesco, Qvar, Asmanex, Singularair, Accolate, Zyflo, Serevent, Foradil, Perforomist, Advair, Symbicort, Dulera and Theophylline.

**Rescue medications** should only be taken occasionally, when needed, to treat asthma attacks. Examples are Albuterol, Proair, Ventolin, Xopenex and Atrovent.

The best way to reduce the risk of permanent lung damage is by consistently taking maintenance medications as directed by your doctor. Take them even when your asthma symptoms aren’t severe.

**Your personal action plan**
If you have asthma, ask your doctor about making a personal asthma action plan. This plan will list your medicines, how to take them and when to take them. The plan also helps you determine when you should call your doctor or go to the emergency room. Your plan will likely include using a peak flow meter at home to show how your lungs are working.

**Use the rules of two:**
- Do you use your rescue inhaler more than twice a week?
- Do you wake up at night with asthma symptoms more than twice a month?
- Do you refill your rescue inhaler more than two times a year?
- Does your peak flow meter measure 2 times, 10 or 20 percent, less than your baseline when you are experiencing asthma symptoms?

If you can answer yes to any of these questions, speak with you doctor. He or she can take another look at how well your condition is controlled.

**Tips**
- Set up a detailed medicine list with directions to help you keep medications in order.
- Set an alarm or leave notes where you will see them to remind you to take your medicine.
- Sign up for mobile text reminders at Humana.com/takemymedicine.
- Take your medicine when you do a certain activity every day, such as brushing your teeth, drinking your morning cup of coffee or watching the evening news.
- Some pharmacies in your network can also send you an alert when it’s time to order refills of your medicines. Visit the My Profile section of Humana.com to learn more.
- Ask your doctor about writing for a 90-day supply on maintenance medications. This will help to ensure you always have an adequate supply of medication on hand.
- It’s important to know what can make your asthma symptoms worse. These can include allergens like animal fur and dust mites. Things in the air like tobacco smoke, strong odors and sprays also can make asthma symptoms worse. Stay away from these triggers and take your long-term controller medicine to prevent lung damage and asthma attacks.
- If you smoke, the most important step you can take is to quit. This will help keep your lung condition from getting worse. Many tools are available to help you quit. You can also find tips at www.smokefree.gov.
- It’s important to have the right inhaler technique. Review your technique regularly with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Annual flu shots are important to keep you healthy. Ask your doctor if you’re up to date with the flu shot and other vaccinations you might need.
Resources

Humana is a Medicare Advantage HMO, PPO and PFFS organization and a stand-alone prescription drug plan with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in any Humana plan depends on contract renewal.
For new prescription requests from Humana Pharmacy, please allow 7-10 days for processing and shipment after the pharmacy receives the prescription (from you or your doctor). Your refill should arrive within 5-7 days. It may take longer if the pharmacy has to call you or your healthcare provider with questions about the order. If you have questions about your order, please contact Humana Pharmacy at 1-800-379-0092 (TTY: 711). Other pharmacies are available in our network.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Room 509F, HHH Building
Washington, D.C. 20201
1-800-368-1019, 800-537-7697 (TDD)
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