

# 3 Key Things to Know About Asthma

Breathing is a breeze for most people. But asthma can undermine this simple act. If you've recently been diagnosed with asthma, learning about the disease and its treatments can help you stay in control. Start here with these three key facts:

1. Asthma doesn't go away. Asthma is a chronic lung disease that develops in people of all ages. When you have asthma, you won't always have symptoms. But the airways in your lungs are always inflamed. They become tight and narrow if you breathe in what's known as a trigger, such as pollen, smoke, pet dander or dust. This can cause your asthma to flare up. As a result, you might cough, wheeze, be-

come short of breath or feel your chest get tight.

2. Asthma needs an action plan.

Ask your doctor what specific steps you need to take to control your asthma. You should be able to lead a normal life with few (if any) symptoms. As part of your care, you should follow an asthma action plan. Among other things, your plan will help you understand how to avoid your specific asthma triggers.

And it will include a list of the medicines you need to

take.

Medicines called long-term controllers help control asthma symptoms. So if they're prescribed for you, it's important to take them even when you feel

fine. You will also need a quick-relief medicine—often called a rescue inhaler—that can help stop an asthma attack once it starts. Carry your inhaler with you at all times in case you have a sudden attack.

3. Asthma can be severe, even life-threatening. Never underestimate the seriousness of this disease—people do

die from asthma. That's why it's important to get emergency medical help for a severe asthma attack. Your action plan will spell out when to do that. For instance, it may advise you to seek emergency care if you become very short of breath or if your symptoms do not get better when you take your quick-relief medicine.



Dr. Silvia Diego, MD

*Dr. Silvia Diego, MD, partners with Health Plan of San Joaquin (HPSJ) through its Provider Network. A pediatrician practicing with Family First Medical Care in Modesto, here is what she recently observed about asthma – and effective care – here in the northern Central Valley.*

*"In my practice, we see so many kids dealing with dangerously complex, chronic asthma. HPSJ has been an essential partner as we work to keep kids healthy, active, in school, learning*

*– and out of the ER. HPSJ's Medication Management-Asthma Initiative has meant parents do stay on top of prescriptions. Now, if parents are not keeping up with prescribed asthma controller medications, HPSJ, the pharmacist and I team up with them. HPSJ Medical Management staff even help parents overcome barriers in getting to the pharmacy. My practice partners and I are also big fans of CHEER, HPSJ's Community Health Education and Engagement Referral Program."*