



  
WALKING A  
GOOD WALK WITH  
**ASTHMA**  
AN EDUCATIONAL WORKBOOK



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# SELF-GUIDE

The Asthma Society of Canada helps all Canadians with *asthma* live an active life and control their disease. This workbook has been designed for First Nations community members and has information specifically relevant to these communities.

As a First Nations person, you are four times more likely to have *asthma* than other Canadians.

In this workbook, you will learn about *asthma* and how to *reduce* your exposure to things that make your *asthma* symptoms worse. You will also learn about the right medication to control your *asthma*.

This workbook is separated into four main sections as follows:

Section 1: What is Asthma?

Section 2: Asthma Triggers

Section 3: Avoidance Strategies

Section 4: Asthma Medications

Each section is colour-coded and will provide you with the necessary information on how to live an active life with *asthma*. You will find overviews at the beginning of each section, which describe the most important messages. You will also find an “Asthma Quiz” at the end of each section to test your knowledge on what you have learned.

Throughout the workbook, you will also find “Quick Tips.” These “Quick Tips” are basic ideas to get you thinking. They will provide you with important messages on how you can better manage your environment and control your *asthma*.

“Personal stories” of First Nations community members living with *asthma* can be found throughout the workbook. If you do not understand some of the terminology used to describe *asthma* and its *triggers*, you will find an explanation in the “Glossary of Terms” on page 84 of this workbook. You can tell which words are in the Glossary because they look like *this (italics)*.



## AN ASTHMA STORY

Delbert was tired from a long day at work. He had just picked up his son from school and decided it would be a good time for them to get some fresh air and exercise together. There was a nice trail that led to a beaver dam where they might even catch sight of some wildlife. Jimmy was reluctant at first and complained about missing his tv show but Delbert could tell he liked being in the forest. It reminded him of days long ago and walks with his granny. She had taught him to take some time every day to be outside and just listen... So he motioned to Jimmy to be still and they sat down on the ground under a tree. The wind ruffled their hair gently, and he told his son to pay attention to the rustling of the leaves above. Air, it was so important — life all around depended on it, the plants, the animals, but just trying to breathe it in had become a struggle for him. It was hard to get used to having an illness and taking medicine all the time. He had been healthy all his life. He had always been active on the land, following his dad on the trap line as a child and taking over as a young adult. But since he started working at the mill a few years ago his health started to suffer. Doctors had said he had *asthma*— he hadn't even ever heard of it before but they said, it was *chronic* which meant all

the time and so he had had to learn to take care of it. They said the airways that carried air to his *lungs* were swelling up and making it hard for the air to get through. So they gave him this gadget called a puffer to help him breathe and told him to quit smoking. He had pretty much done that and avoided being around smokers even though it meant that most of his friends and relatives didn't come over much any more. There were the allergies too: he'd wake up with a runny nose and eyes most nights ... *mould* and dust the doctors said. He knew his house was full of that stuff and they badly needed to move but the wait list was long so he tried as best he could to keep the home neat and tidy. What was worse was the pollution in the air nowadays — sometimes it was better just to stay inside depending which way the wind was blowing.

The worst part was that his little boy, Jimmy, was suffering too. He was a happy, healthy baby at first, but before he was even a year old, the little guy began to cough and wheeze.

His wife Amy had died in childbirth and Delbert took care of the child with the help of his sisters. He had needed a lot of help when Jimmy was a baby as he was

in and out of hospitals. Those were very stressful times. Jimmy was eight now and things were a lot better. He wanted so bad to be like the other kids, run around and play and not have to worry about carrying his medicine with him wherever he went. The other kids bugged him about it too — they would try to take his inhaler away and teased him. Delbert worried about it a lot. It kept him up at night. Luckily the teachers at the school were helpful. They had an arrangement now where Jimmy left his *asthma* kit with one of them so he didn't have to worry any more and always knew where to go when it was needed.

Also they had somebody come to the school and talk to the kids about *asthma* and let them know that Jimmy might have to take medicine but it didn't mean he wasn't strong and couldn't grow up to do whatever he wanted. Jimmy was already proving the point and didn't let his illness stop him from trying new things like skating and riding horses. It was especially hard in the winter. Being in the cold made it feel like he was suffocating sometimes. Delbert taught his son to breathe through his nose and warm the air up, making it a little easier to breathe in. And even though the doctors said that pets could be a problem because of their coat Jimmy wasn't affected by the

horses. He just had to stay away from the hay and couldn't help when it was time to haul it around.

Delbert knew from his granny that it was important to eat healthy foods like fruit and vegetables. She said it was about respecting one's body the same way we respect the land and the animals that feed us. "Take care," she said. "Everything we do will be felt around us," she said. Delbert knew it and wanted more than anything to help his son. His granny had taught him about balance as it was shown in the Medicine Wheel teachings. The emotional,

the physical, the mental and the spiritual parts of our life are all connected and need the same attention to stay in balance. If we don't take care of all those parts we can get sick. Jimmy nodded and smiled. He loved hearing about his grandmother and the old ways. Delbert stood up and took his son's hand. In his mind, he was already planning their next outing to the trap line as he made his way back to the car.

*Based on real life experiences and written by Audrey Huntley (German/Scottish/Anishnawbe)*

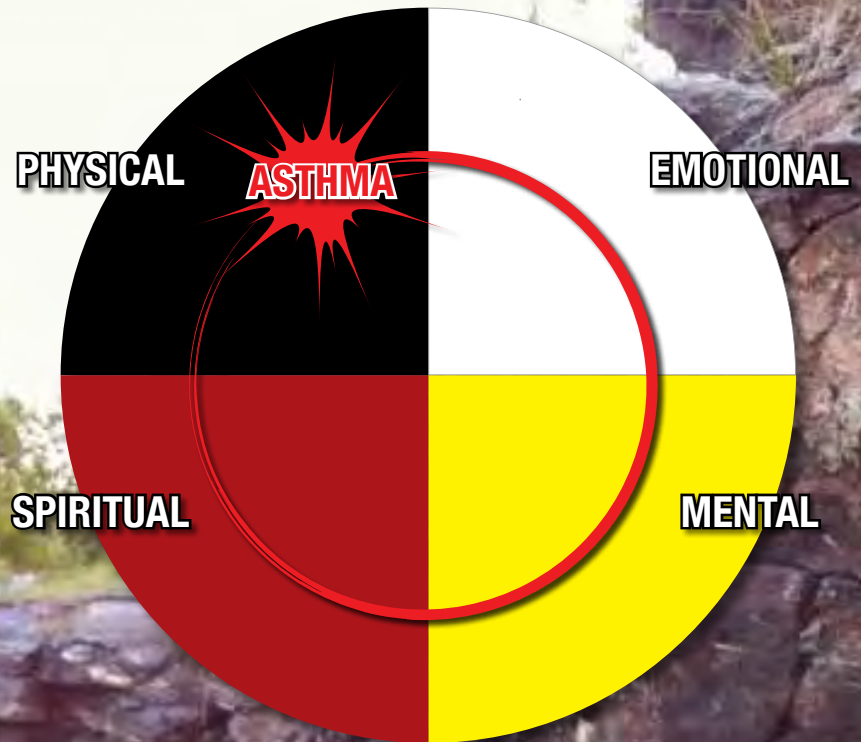






Photo by [MuskratMagazine.com](http://MuskratMagazine.com)



# WHAT IS ASTHMA?

- *Asthma* is a *chronic inflammatory* disease of the airways
- It is important to learn about *asthma* in order to manage it properly and live an active, symptom-free life
- Many *asthma triggers* can be avoided
- There are safe medications that can treat swelling effectively and prevent *asthma* symptoms

# WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Doctors describe *asthma* as “a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways.”

- ✧ *Chronic* means all the time
- ✧ *Inflammatory* or *inflammation* means swelling
- ✧ *Airways* are the tubes that bring air to and from your *lungs* when you breathe

In other words, if you have *asthma*, you have swelling in your airways. When your airways swell, they produce *mucous*. *Mucous* is a thick liquid you sometimes cough up. When there is swelling and *mucous* in your airways, air has less space to get in and out. That makes it harder for you to breathe. Swelling can happen slowly... so slowly that you may not even notice that you are having a harder time breathing.

Swelling is a big part of the problem, but it is not the whole problem. As the swelling increases, your airways become very sensitive. Small muscles around your airways start to twitch and tighten, leaving less space for air to get in and out of your *lungs*. Doctors call this *bronchoconstriction*. When all of these things happen, you might start:

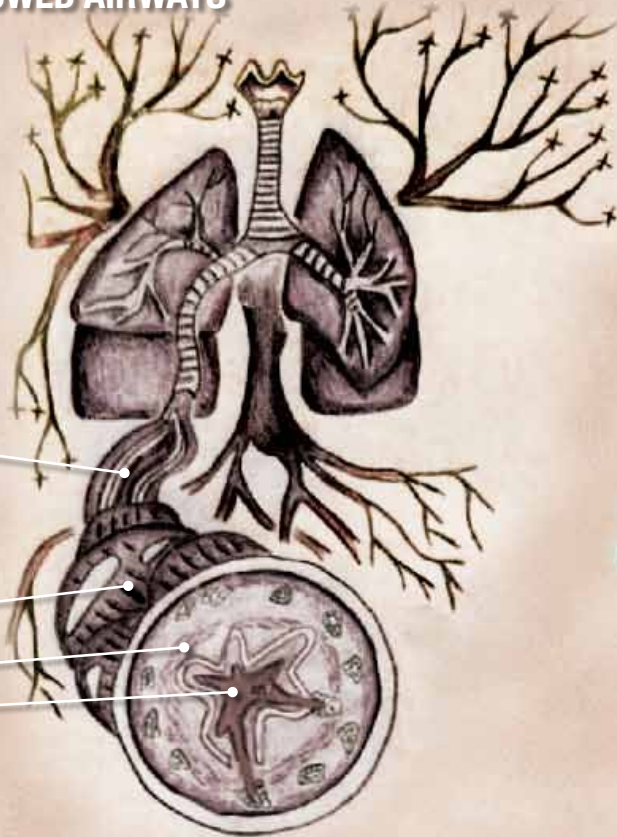
- ✧ Coughing
- ✧ Wheezing or whistling
- ✧ Being short of breath or having difficulty breathing

It is very important to control your *asthma*. When your *asthma* is under control, you will be able to live a normal and active life without *asthma* symptoms.



# UNTREATED LUNG AIRWAY WITH ASTHMA

• NARROWED AIRWAYS



• DAMAGED AIRWAY PASSAGE WALL

• INFLAMMATION

• CONSTRICTED MUSCLES

# LUNG AIRWAY AFTER ASTHMA TREATMENT

• WIDENED AIRWAYS



• FURTHER DAMAGE TO AIRWAY WALL MAY BE PREVENTED

• REDUCED INFLAMMATION

• RELAXED MUSCLES



## How do you know if your asthma is under control?

- ✦ You feel okay during and after exercise
- ✦ You do not cough, wheeze or feel short of breath on most days
- ✦ You sleep through the night without coughing, wheezing or feeling short of breath
- ✦ You do not *reduce* your exercise or you are not away from work or school because of your *asthma*
- ✦ Your breathing tests are normal
- ✦ You take your *reliever medication* (blue puffer) less than four times a week (counting the times before exercise)

## If your asthma is NOT under control, it could be because:

- ✦ A respiratory infection or a cold has increased your symptoms
- ✦ Something in your surroundings is causing you to have *asthma* symptoms or an *asthma* attack
- ✦ You are not using the right medication or the right dose of medication
- ✦ You are not using your medication correctly
- ✦ Something other than *asthma* is causing your symptoms and you need to talk to your doctor or nurse about it



Photo by MuskratMagazine.com

## You can control your asthma by:

- ✦ Avoiding your *asthma triggers* (learn more about your *triggers* and how to avoid them in the *Asthma Triggers* section)
- ✦ Taking your *asthma* medication as recommended by your doctor or nurse (Refer to the *Asthma Medication* section for more information)
- ✦ Living a healthy lifestyle
- ✦ Talking to your doctor or nurse about best ways to control your *asthma*

## When you have asthma, it is important to live a healthy lifestyle by:

- ✦ Eating fresh fruit and vegetables when possible
- ✦ Keeping your home neat and tidy
- ✦ Keeping your home dry
- ✦ Keeping the number of your pets to a minimum if you are *allergic* to them and making sure their bedding is clean
- ✦ Staying active and maintaining a healthy weight
- ✦ Sleeping well so you feel refreshed in the morning
- ✦ Not smoking, especially while you are pregnant or when around young children



# QUIZ

1. How do you know whether your *asthma* is under control? Please give one example.

You can tell if your *asthma* is under control if \_\_\_\_\_







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-  You feel okay during and after exercise
-  You do not cough, wheeze or feel short of breath on most days
-  You sleep through the night without coughing, wheezing or feeling short of breath
-  You do not *reduce* your exercise or you are not away from work or school because of your *asthma*
-  Your breathing tests are normal
-  You take your *reliever medication* (blue puffer) less than four times a week (counting the times before exercise)

2. If your child has *asthma* will he/she be able to participate in sports?

*Yes, with the proper asthma management, your child will be able to play sports*








# ASTHMA TRIGGERS

- *Triggers* are things around you that can cause swelling of your airways
- Your *asthma* symptoms can get worse from contact with *allergic triggers* (allergens) and *non-allergic triggers* (irritants, colds, exercise, stress)
- Common *allergens* include: *dust mites*, *mould*, animal dandruff (*dander*) and *pollen*
- Common *irritants* include: tobacco smoke, poor indoor and outdoor air quality, road dust, outdoor burning and forest fires

# ASTHMA TRIGGERS

Avoiding *triggers* is an important part of your *asthma* management. In this section, you will see lots of “*Quick Tips*” .

These are basic ideas about how you can avoid your *asthma triggers*. You will also find more information about these ideas in the “*Avoidance Strategies*” section of the workbook on page 41.



## QUICK TIPS

- Find out what your *triggers* are so you can try to avoid being around them
- Keep notes of what is around you when you have *asthma* symptoms. Soon, you will know which *triggers* affect your *asthma*
  - Be patient because this can take time and effort
  - Fill in the “*My Triggers*” section of this workbook and bring it to your next visit with your health care provider
- Stay away from your *triggers* as much as you can. It may not always be possible as some *triggers* are everywhere, but it is important for keeping your *asthma* under control

## What can start or “trigger” your asthma symptoms?

**Triggers** are things in your everyday life that...

- ✦ Can make your *asthma* symptoms worse or cause an *asthma* attack
- ✦ Can cause swelling of the airways

**There are two types of triggers:**

**Allergic triggers (allergens)** – substances that are usually harmless, but can cause a reaction in people who are sensitive (*allergic*), for example *mould* and animal dandruff (*dander*)

**Non-allergic triggers** – substances that irritate the airways causing existing inflamed and swollen airways to become worse, for example tobacco smoke and strong smells

## Allergic Triggers (Allergens)

An allergen is something that you are *allergic* to. Being *allergic* means your body over-reacts to something around you like dust, *pollen* or animal dandruff.

If you touch, or breathe in something you are *allergic* to, you may have an *allergic* reaction. Some symptoms of this reaction include:

- ✦ Swelling of the eyes and/or skin
- ✦ Running and/or itchy nose
- ✦ Watery eyes

If you have *asthma*, you may also have allergies. Allergies and *asthma* are related, but they are not the same.

Some allergens can make your *asthma* worse as they can lead to:

- ✦ Swelling (*inflammation*) in the airways
- ✦ *Mucous* production
- ✦ Tightening of the muscles around the airways

These effects will block the flow of air to your *lungs* and cause difficulty breathing.



## QUICK TIP

Talk to your community health care provider about being tested for allergies

# QUICK TIPS

- Keep the humidity in your home between 40 and 50% if possible
- *Reduce* the moisture in your home by opening the windows regularly or by using a *dehumidifier* if necessary
- Proper house cleaning, especially underneath the carpet is important and it is even, better to replace carpet with area rugs (see section on making your home healthy on page 64)



## Main Allergens:

### Mould

- ✦ *Mould* is a fungus that lives in damp places, like:
  - Showers and bathrooms
  - Window sills
  - Inside drywall
  - Laundry rooms
  - Kitchens, even refrigerators
  - Garbage bins
  - Carpets and soft furniture (sofas, armchairs)
  - Basements
- ✦ *Mould* looks like a stain that is often black or white, but it can be any colour
- ✦ *Mould* may smell “old” or musty
- ✦ *Mould* sends invisible pieces called *spores* through the air. If you are *allergic* to *mould*, breathing in large amounts of *spores* may make your *asthma* worse.
- ✦ Moisture can be also trapped under the carpet leading to *mould* growth. If children and/or babies play or crawl on the carpet, they may be close to *mould*
- ✦ Due to the high humidity and poor *ventilation* in the winter, *mould* is often a greater concern during winter months. Winter moisture can be due to *condensation* during cooler weathers.
- ✦ *Mould* can also be found outdoors, in rotting leaves, for example.




# QUICK TIPS

- Keep soft furniture and stuffed toys to a minimum in your home
- Use a vacuum with a *HEPA filter* and wash these surfaces regularly
- Use mattress and pillow covers to protect them from *dust mites*




## Dust mites

 *Dust mites* are tiny insects that are too small to see with the naked eye. They live in:

- Carpets and soft furniture (couches, armchairs)
- Curtains
- Mattresses
- Pillows, sheets and blankets
- Stuffed toys



 If you are *allergic* to *dust mites* and their droppings and breathe them in, it can make your *asthma* worse



## QUICK TIPS

- Keep your pet out of the bedroom and main living areas if possible
- if your pets are making your *asthma* worse, find another appropriate home for them
- Vacuum or clean your home regularly, especially soft surfaces, like the carpet or pillows, that trap animal dander



## Animal dander or dandruff



- ✦ Animal *dander* are bits of dead skin, saliva and urine that comes from animals
- ✦ *Dander* comes from pets like:
  - Dogs
  - Cats
  - Birds
  - Hamsters, gerbils, mice
  - Horses and other outdoor animals
- ✦ *Dander* can float in the air, even if the animal is not present
- ✦ *Dander* can remain on furniture and in carpets for a year or more after the animal has gone
- ✦ If you are *allergic* to animals, living with them or being close to them may cause *asthma* symptoms
- ✦ Even being around someone with pets can trigger your *asthma* because they may have *dander* on their clothes



## Pollen

- ✦ *Pollen* is a powder that the wind blows from trees, grass, garden plants and weeds, like ragweed
- ✦ *Pollen* can come into the house on clothing, on pets, and through open windows
- ✦ Tree *pollen* is most common in the spring, grass *pollen* in the summer, while ragweed *pollen* is most common in the fall. There is very little *pollen* in the winter in Canada. The levels of *pollen* also depend on which part of the country you live
- ✦ The types of *pollen* you see in each season depend on where you live



## QUICK TIPS

- If you are *allergic to pollen*, try to stay indoors when you know the *pollen* count is high, especially on hot and windy days
- Dry your laundry indoors so that *pollen* does not get trapped in it
- Wear sunglasses to keep *pollen* from getting into your eyes
- Use air conditioning if possible, both in the home and car, so that windows can stay closed



## Food allergies

- ✦ If you have *asthma*, you may also have food allergies
- ✦ In Canada, the foods that cause most allergies are:
  - Nuts like peanuts, tree nuts (like almonds), Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, pine nuts, pistachio nuts and walnuts
  - Sesame seeds
  - Milk
  - Eggs
  - Fish
  - Shellfish (crabs, lobsters, shrimps, etc.)
  - Soy products
  - Wheat
  - *Sulphites*, which are present in alcohol and beer, canned and frozen fruit, dried fruit, deli meats, and many snack foods
- ✦ If you are *allergic* to certain types of food, your skin may itch or get a rash, or you could have a stomach ache, throw up/vomit or have the runs/*diarrhea* or difficulty breathing
- ✦ Most *allergic* reactions to food are mild, but some can be severe and a few can even be deadly
- ✦ Talk to a community health care provider if you think you have allergies



## QUICK TIPS

- If you are *allergic* to some types of food, you should make sure you know what's in the food you buy or eat by reading the list of ingredients very carefully
- If recommended, carry an *epinephrine auto-injector* (e.g. EpiPen® or Twinject®) with you in case you have a severe *allergic* reaction (an auto-injector is a needle that looks like a pen that you can use to inject medication on your own)







## QUICK TIPS

- Try to quit smoking and ask your doctor or nurse about services or medicine to help you
- Keep your home smoke-free whenever possible



## Non-Allergic Triggers

*Non-allergic triggers* are things that irritate the airways and can make your *asthma* symptoms worse.

### Traditional tobacco use

Native people of the Americas have grown and used traditional or sacred tobacco for thousands of years.

In Canada, along with sage, cedar and sweet grass, tobacco is used in ceremonies, prayers, medicine, and smudging. It is also used to give thanks.

- ✦ When traditional tobacco is not burned, it will probably not affect you
- ✦ The smoke from burning tobacco may be an *irritant*
- ✦ Tobacco burned at ceremonies may make your *asthma* or breathing problems worse
- ✦ The smoke from burned cedar, sage and sweet grass may also make your *asthma* worse

## Non-traditional tobacco use

*Non-traditional tobacco use* includes smoking cigarettes, chewing tobacco or snuff, smoking non-traditional tobacco in non-sacred pipes and smoking cigars.



*Non-traditional tobacco use* (smoking) is very high in First Nations communities. Around 60% of on-reserve people between ages 18 and 34 currently smoke.

✧ Non-traditional tobacco contains chemicals that can affect your health. It contains *nicotine*, which makes you want even more tobacco

✧ Tobacco smoke is an *irritant* that may make your *asthma* symptoms worse

- If someone smokes when pregnant, the smoke reaches the baby, increasing the chances of the baby developing *asthma*

✧ **Second-hand smoke** is the tobacco smoke that stays in the air after a person has finished smoking. This smoke can stay in the air for a long time. Anybody in the area can be affected and it can make your asthma symptoms worse

- Smoking in front of your children makes them more likely to start smoking as well as get *asthma*
- They can also have more frequent colds, sore throats, ear infection
- The risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and learning problems may be also higher

✧ **Third-hand smoke** is what is left over after *second-hand smoke* has gone — it builds up over time and gets trapped in your hair, skin, clothes, soft furnishings and toys

- The chemicals in *third-hand smoke* can still get into your *lungs*
- Babies breathe in more chemicals from *third-hand smoke* because they breathe faster and spend more time on the floor





## QUICK TIPS

- Open your windows regularly
- Avoid using scented products, sprays and strong chemicals like bleach when possible

### Home cleaning and personal products

- ✦ Indoor air may contain *irritants* from personal products like spray perfume, deodorant and hairspray
- ✦ Strong scents from air fresheners (including scented candles) and home cleaning products are also *irritants*
- ✦ Some of the materials used in traditional art work like paints, glue and wood dust are *irritants* too





## QUICK TIPS

- Stay indoors during extreme wind, heat or cold — if you must go out, cover up with a scarf
- If available, monitor your local air quality conditions with the *Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)*. It gives you information about outdoor air quality in your community, and advice on how to change your outdoor activities on bad outdoor air days.

You can find this information on the Internet depending on where you live: [www.airhealth.ca](http://www.airhealth.ca)

### Weather and poor outdoor air quality

- ✦ It is harder to breathe in cold, dry winter air
- ✦ You will be more likely to breathe in *pollen* after a thunderstorm
- ✦ Bad outdoor air quality can make your *asthma* worse
- ✦ In some areas of Canada, *smog* (which is a mix of gases, outdoor dust and ozone) can make breathing difficult too





## QUICK TIPS

- If you can, stay away from people who are sick
- If you get sick, you should sneeze or cough into your elbow to avoid spraying germs on other people
- Stay home to avoid spreading your sickness
- Talk to your community health care provider about taking the *flu shot*
- Stay *hydrated* by drinking a lot of water
- Frequently wash your hands or use *hand sanitizer* if no soap or water is available

## Colds and flu

- ✦ You can get the flu or a cold when somebody coughs or sneezes near you and you breathe in the drops
- ✦ You can also catch a cold or the flu when you are in contact with a sick person or touch something a sick person has touched before you
- ✦ If you get *asthma* symptoms from a cold, you might have them long after the cold has gone
- ✦ Carry *hand sanitizer* or wipes when at outdoor events with no proper washroom facilities







## QUICK TIPS

- Make sure your doctor or nurse know you have *asthma* before you take any traditional, *prescription* or *over-the-counter* medicine
- If you get *asthma* symptoms when you start taking a new medicine, stop taking the medicine and tell your doctor or nurse right away

## Medication

- ✦ Some *prescription* medications and *over-the-counter* medicine that you can buy yourself can cause serious *asthma* attacks. These include:
  - *Beta blockers* used for some heart problems and headaches
  - Acetylsalicylic acid (ASA or Aspirin)
  - Some eye drops
  - Some blood pressure medication
- ✦ Some traditional medicine (like cedar) can also make your *asthma* worse, depending on how you take it.

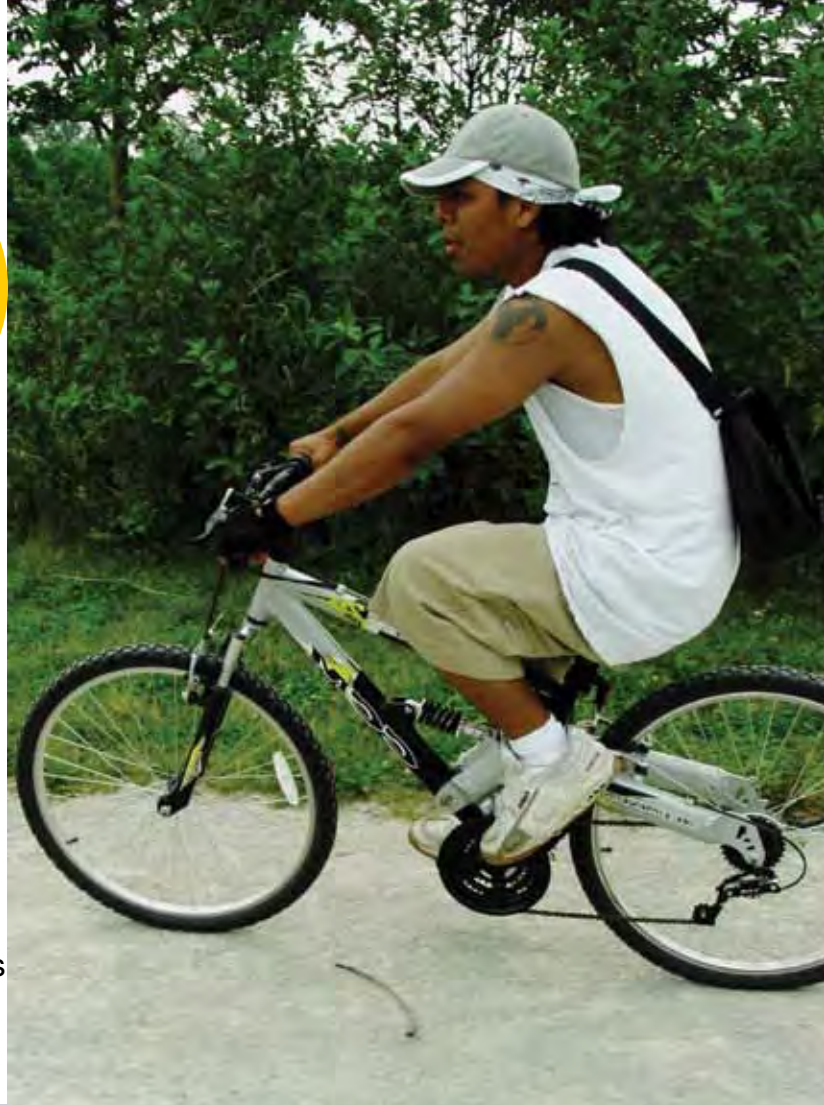


## Exercise and physical activity

Staying fit is important, whether you have *asthma* or not. You can stay healthy, keep your weight down and enjoy life more.

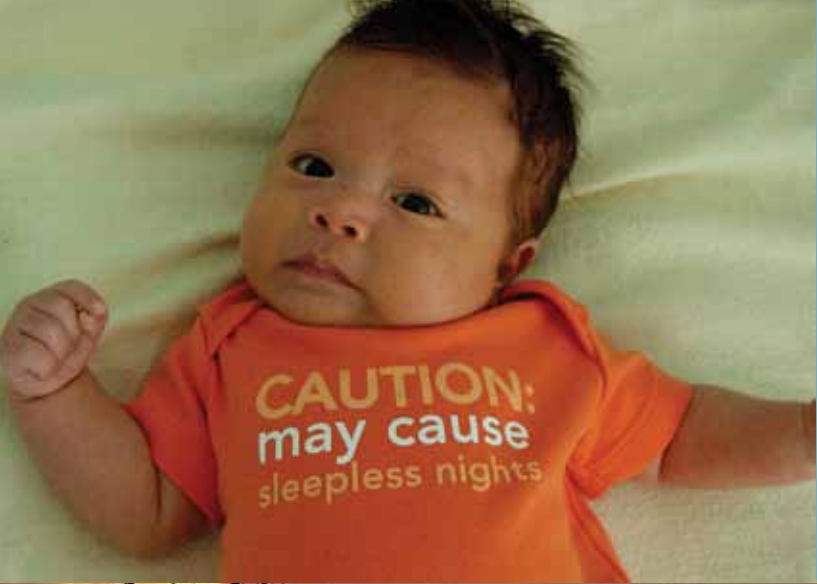


- ✦ Having *asthma* does not mean that you cannot exercise or be active
- ✦ If you have problems in your ability to exercise because of your *asthma*, you might not be managing your *asthma* as best as you can
- ✦ Sometimes heat and humidity or cold and dry air can cause or make your *asthma* symptoms worse
- ✦ Some *asthma* friendly sports include archery, lacrosse, basketball, baseball, swimming, golf, volleyball and martial arts



## QUICK TIP

If your *asthma* bothers you when you exercise, talk to your doctor or nurse about your *asthma* management



## QUICK TIPS

- Relax for 30 minutes every day somewhere you feel comfortable
- Get plenty of sleep
- Talk to someone you feel comfortable with like a friend or a community leader, an Elder, or community health care worker if you feel stressed out or run down



### Stress

- ✦ When you are stressed, your body thinks you are in danger and speeds up your heart rate, makes you breathe faster and gives you a burst of energy
- ✦ Some stress is good, but too much stress may make your *asthma* worse



## Irritants at work

- ✦ Some *asthma triggers* may be at your work
- ✦ If your *asthma* is worse during the week and gets better during your days off, you probably do have *irritants* at work causing your *asthma* symptoms
- ✦ Some jobs that may *trigger asthma* include:
  - Mill workers and carpenters because of wood dust
  - Fish packers or any work where you have to touch fish
  - Oil refinery workers
  - Factory, welders, and sheet-metal workers because of gas from heating metals
  - Mine workers
  - Farmers and bakers because of flour and grain dust
  - Fabric workers because of cotton dust
  - Electricians
  - Artists, painters and carvers
  - Cleaners
  - Office workers if the environment is not scent-free



## QUICK TIP

If you have *asthma* that gets worse at work, talk to your doctor or nurse about what *triggers* could be at your work place









## QUICK TIP

Tell your township, Band office or other local office if you live on an unpaved road and ask them to spray the road to *reduce* the dust



## Road dust

-  The dust from cars and trucks when they travel on unpaved or gravel roads can spread far
-  Road dust can make your *asthma* worse when you breathe it in
-  Keep windows rolled up when travelling on unpaved roads
-  Kids should avoid playing on or near dusty roads



## Outdoor burning and forest fires



- ✦ Smoke from forest fires is full of many *irritants*. If you breathe in this smoke, you may:
  - Cough
  - Feel tightness in your chest
  - Have trouble breathing
  - Have sore and watery eyes
  - Have a runny nose
- ✦ Smoke from burning field grass contains:
  - Soot
  - Ash
  - Dirt
  - Soil dust
  - *Pollens*
- ✦ All these may make your *asthma* worse
- ✦ Smoke from fireplaces and wood stoves contains gases that can irritate your *lungs* and cause an *asthma* attack
- ✦ The smoke from chimneys, and smoke houses might also make your *asthma* or breathing problems worse



### QUICK TIP

Watch for symptoms if you are around wood or grass smoke or other sources of outdoor burning

# QUIZ

1. What are two types of *triggers*?

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*Allergic and non-allergic triggers are two types of triggers – mould and pollen are allergens; tobacco smoke and perfumes are irritants*

2. How do I know if I have allergies?

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Discuss with your community health care provider










# AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

- It is important to find out what your *asthma triggers* are
- Take measures to prevent and avoid them in order to better control and manage your *asthma*



## AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES

This section offers advice on how to prevent and avoid the most common *asthma triggers*. You will also find information on what you can do to make your home and surroundings more *asthma* and allergy friendly, and who to ask for additional help.

We have highlighted the most important information using this symbol 

# Allergic Triggers (Allergens)

## Mould

### What to avoid

- ✦ Reduce moisture such as condensation, steam or water leaks in places where *mould* can grow
- ✦ Try not to keep things in the basement like cardboard boxes and old furniture that attract *mould*
- ✦ Avoid having carpets in your home, especially in the basement and bedroom
- ✦ Avoid too many house plants because *mould* can collect in the soil
- ✦ Avoid raking leaves because *mould* grows there too

### How to clean

- ✦ Use soap or dish washing liquid and water to clean mouldy areas
- ✦ Make sure you dry the area that you have cleaned
- ✦ When cleaning, protect yourself and wear rubber gloves, long sleeves and cover your mouth with a mask or cloth
- ✦ Ask children, seniors and people with *asthma* and allergies or other breathing problems to leave the house while you clean



## MOST IMPORTANT

Remove and wipe any excess moisture when and where you can



## MOST IMPORTANT

DO NOT use bleach, since it is no longer recommended for cleaning *mould*

## How to prevent

- ✦ Keep your fridge clean and drain the fridge trays often
- ✦ Keep garbage bins/cans clean
- ✦ Use vents and bathroom fans when you take a shower or bath
- ✦ Wipe down bathroom tiles, bath tub and toilet after showering
- ✦ Keep shower curtains clean and free of moisture
- ✦ Clean and maintain the filter on your air conditioner if you have one
- ✦ Replace carpets with wood, tile or linoleum when possible
- ✦ Use small area rugs if needed as they are easier to clean

## MOST IMPORTANT

Keep the humidity level in your home between 40 to 50% (for more information refer to page 64)



## MOST IMPORTANT

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you think *mould* might be affecting your *asthma*

### Who to contact for additional help?

Contact your community health center and/or Band Council to report issues or concerns about *mould* in your home, especially if:

- ✦ *Mould* area is bigger than one square meter (the size of a regular garbage bag folded in half)
- ✦ If *mould* comes back after you clean it many times
- ✦ If you or a family member suffers from *asthma* due to *mould* exposure





# MOST IMPORTANT

Try to *reduce* items in your home that collect dust

## Dust and Dust Mites

### What to avoid

-  Avoid items that collect dust like blinds, soft furniture and curtains
-  Limit stuffed toys, especially in the bedroom



## How to prevent

- ✦ Cover your bed mattress, box spring and pillows in *dust mite* protective covers if you are allergic to *dust mites*
- ✦ Wash all bedding and blankets in hot water (60°C) once a week
- ✦ Wipe window ledges and shelves with a damp cloth or mop
- ✦ Clean blinds regularly by using a wet cloth or washing them with soap and water
- ✦ Vacuum your bed mattress, soft furniture and curtains regularly
- ✦ Protect yourself and cover your mouth with a cloth or wear a mask when vacuuming
- ✦ Ask somebody else to vacuum if dust and *dust mites* affect your *asthma*
- ✦ Wait 20 minutes after vacuuming for dust to settle before using the room
- ✦ Put un-washable items like quilts and stuffed toys in a plastic bag in the freezer or leave outside in freezing temperatures for 24 hours
- ✦ Replace carpets with wood, tile or linoleum or use small rugs which are easy to clean
- ✦ Change your furnace filter as recommended

## MOST IMPORTANT

- Keep your house clean by dusting regularly with a vacuum cleaner that has a *HEPA filter* or a damp mop or cloth
- Cover all mattresses and bedding in dust mite protective covers



## What else you can do

- ✦ Use pull-down blinds instead of horizontal blinds
- ✦ Think about using *asthma* and allergy friendly products (you will find information on one of the certification programs at the end of the workbook)



## MOST IMPORTANT

- Reducing your exposure to pet allergens is the best way to help control your *asthma*. If you decide to keep your pet even though you are *allergic* to it, your *asthma* may get worse
- Stay away from indoor and outdoor animals if you are *allergic* to them

### Animal Dander or Dandruff

#### What to avoid

- ✦ If you are *allergic* to pets and have a pet at home, consider finding a new home for your pet
- ✦ If you have a pet allergy, avoid getting a new pet
- ✦ Keep pets out of the bedroom
- ✦ Keep your child's stuffed toys separate from those your pet plays with
- ✦ Wash your hands after touching or playing with your pet
- ✦ Keep your pets clean by wiping them with a warm damp cloth
- ✦ Talk to your doctor or nurse about your pet allergies and develop a plan on how to avoid your *triggers*



#### What else you can do

- ✦ Vacuum frequently. Use a vacuum cleaner with a high efficiency particulate air (*HEPA*) filter if possible
- ✦ Replace all soft furniture with items that can be wiped clean, if possible
- ✦ Use small area rugs instead of carpets if possible
- ✦ Wash your bedding often







## MOST IMPORTANT

- Talk to your health care provider about your allergies to *pollen* and develop a plan on what you can do during *pollen* seasons
- Make notes in the workbook on questions you would like answered during your next visit


### Pollen


#### What to avoid


 Go outside as little as possible on hot, windy days when *pollen* counts are high


 Avoid being out in the early morning (4 a.m. to 11 a.m.) when *pollen* counts are the highest

#### How to prevent

 Wear sunglasses to prevent *pollen* from getting into your eyes

 Dry laundry indoors to prevent *pollens* from sticking to linens and clothing

 Use a dryer to dry clothes, if available

 Use air conditioning if available and keep house and car windows closed



# MOST IMPORTANT

*Asthma* control is very important for people with food allergies. Talk to your health care provider about managing your *asthma* and food allergies and develop an avoidance plan





# MOST IMPORTANT

You can be *allergic* to any food. Avoid the foods you are allergic to because they may affect your *asthma*




## Food Allergies

### What to avoid

-  Avoid foods to which you are *allergic*
-  Common food allergies include: peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, wheat, fish, soy and sesame seeds



### How to prevent

-  If you think that you have a food allergy, talk to your health care provider to see if:
  - You need to see an allergy specialist
  - You should carry an *epinephrine auto-injector* (a needle that looks like a pen that you can use to inject medication on your own)



What I did on my end, was I changed the food; I avoided milk, avoided eggs and any kind of trigger he could have. I added flax seed oil, fish oil, olive oil, good fats to his diet and I eliminated all scented products and got dust mite covers for all of the beds and pillows. We moved to a location without carpets and I bought air purifiers ..... Now he is the healthiest kid in my house.

Isabelle Aubé, Ottawa, Ontario



## Non-Allergic Triggers

### Traditional and Non-Traditional Tobacco Use



#### What to avoid

- ✧ Avoid *second- and third-hand smoke* exposure and active smoking, whenever possible

#### How to prevent

- ✧ Make your home and car smoke-free whenever possible

#### What else you can do

- ✧ Follow your traditional protocols or talk to Elders, community leaders, and Band Council if the smoke from the burning of traditional tobacco affects your *asthma* and/or breathing

## MOST IMPORTANT

Encourage and support people around you to quit smoking and make their homes smoke-free

*This is a story about how I react to smoke. I am First Nations, a Cree from Saskatchewan. My family is very traditional and we follow our traditional ceremonies, especially feasts. We do feasts after a death, after cleaning graves and to celebrate any important events. The essential component of feasts is the burning of sweet grass. We burn sweet grass to cleanse the area where the feast is being held, the preparers of the food, the food to be served and the servers. The smoke surrounds the feast area, and the smell is so reassuring.*

*When I haven't been able to control my asthma, I find using or being around where sweet grass is being used, causes me to have more difficulty with my ability to breath. It is so embarrassing and most importantly I do not want to show disrespect to one of our gifts, using sweet grass. I usually remain in the ceremony and deal with the breathing issue after the ceremonies are complete.*

*Linda Lauder, Prince George, British Columbia*





*I cannot be out in the winter here...I  
breathe in the cold and I cannot breathe.  
Wanda St. Arnault, High Level, Alberta*




# MOST IMPORTANT

Try to avoid outdoor activity when the weather and/or air quality is bad


## Weather and Poor Outdoor Air Quality



### What to avoid

-  Try to avoid outdoor activities during extreme weather condition like:
  - Cold
  - Humid
  - Hot
  - Stormy and windy
  - High smog or bad air quality days

### What else you can do

-  Talk to your health care provider and develop an avoidance plan if weather and/or poor outdoor air quality affect your *asthma*



# MOST IMPORTANT

If you get a cold or flu try to avoid being in close contact with people as much as possible





## Colds and Flus



### What to avoid

- ✦ Avoid gatherings where you know there are people who might be sick when possible
- ✦ Avoid sharing food, knives, forks and drinking glasses with people you know are sick
- ✦ Talk to your doctor or nurse before you take any cold medication
- ✦ Never give a child Aspirin unless a doctor or nurse says that it is okay

### How to prevent

- ✦ Wash your hands with soap and water or use *hand sanitizer* if soap and water are not available
- ✦ Clean objects that are touched by many people
- ✦ Cough or sneeze into your elbow to avoid spreading germs
- ✦ Stay home if you get sick
- ✦ Avoid touching your face to prevent spreading germs
- ✦ Ask your community health care provider about getting a *flu shot*

 **MOST IMPORTANT**

Wash your hands often to avoid getting sick

# MOST IMPORTANT

Do not stop or avoid exercising if you have *asthma*. Instead, talk to your community health care provider about how to manage your *asthma* and stay active

## Exercise and Physical Activity

### What to avoid

- ✦ Avoid exercising during bad weather conditions and/or bad outdoor air quality days

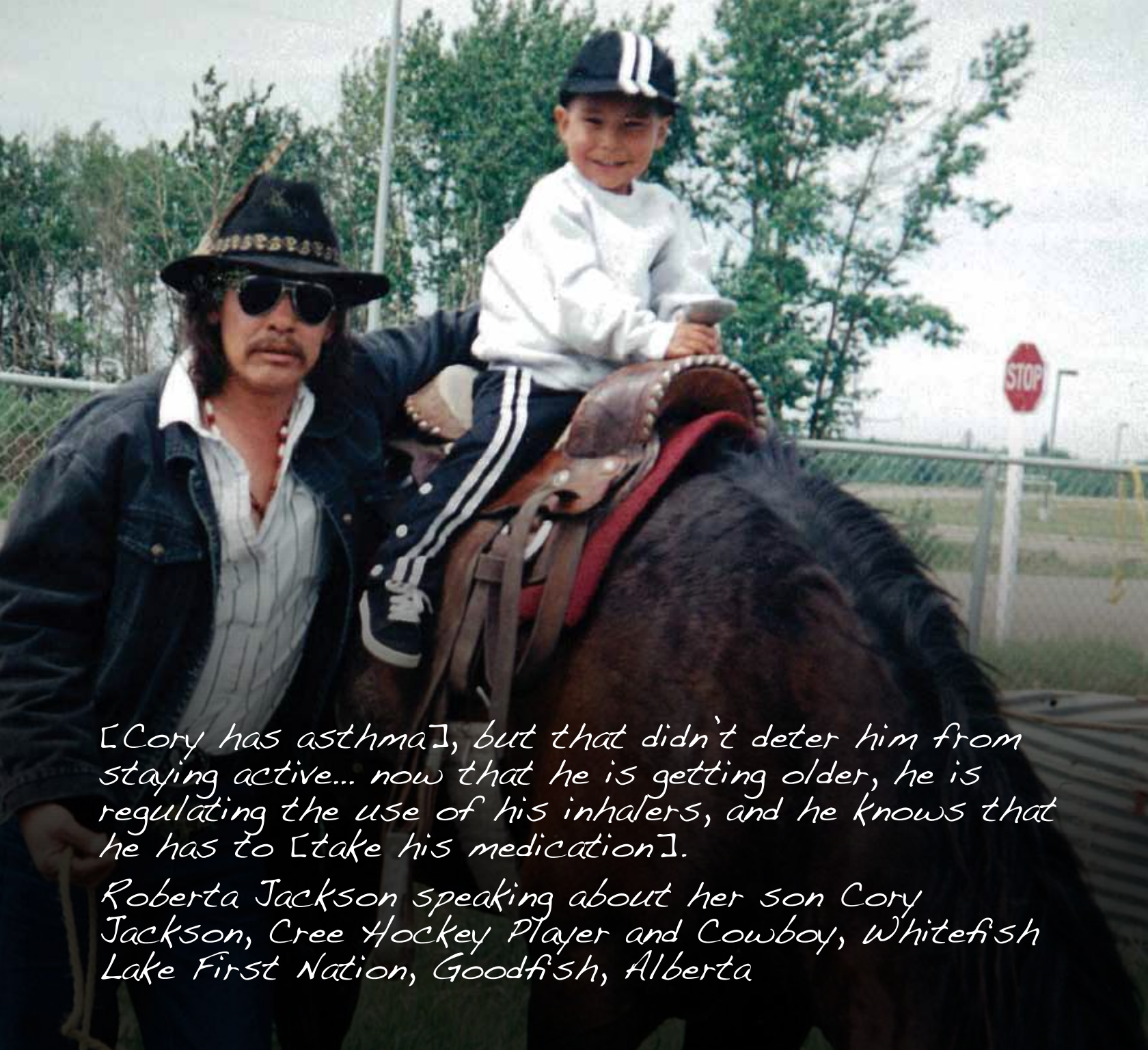


### How to prevent *asthma* symptoms while exercising

- ✦ Think about the best time of day and weather conditions when planning outdoor activities
- ✦ Do 5 to 10 minutes of warm-up exercises before physical activity
- ✦ Do cool-down exercises after physical activity
- ✦ Use your bronchodilator (*reliever*) medication 10 to 15 minutes before exercising
- ✦ Talk to your doctor or nurse if you still have *asthma* symptoms while exercising



Cory Jackson. Alberta Native Provincial Hockey Tournament, 2009




*[Cory has asthma], but that didn't deter him from staying active... now that he is getting older, he is regulating the use of his inhalers, and he knows that he has to [take his medication].*

*Roberta Jackson speaking about her son Cory Jackson, Cree Hockey Player and Cowboy, Whitefish Lake First Nation, Goodfish, Alberta*

## Stress

### How to prevent

- 
- ✦ Talk to an Elder, community leader, family and/or friends (someone you feel comfortable talking to) about stress in your life and what changes you can make to *reduce* it
  - ✦ Be more active
  - ✦ Try to get enough sleep
  - ✦ Try to plan your daily activities ahead of time
  - ✦ Practice relaxation techniques such as:
    - Listen to sounds from nature like running water, waves, birds singing
    - Take a warm bath
    - Go for walks along the water
    - Meditate for half an hour
    - Do breathing exercises
    - Enjoy some quiet time
    - Do some beading, quilting or sewing
    - Do yoga or stretching exercises
    - Listen to music
    - Take a drive to your favourite place and enjoy the moment

### What else you can do

- ✦ Learn to manage your stress better by talking to your community health care provider about helpful books, films, videos, courses and workshops available in your community



## MOST IMPORTANT

Try and take some time — 30 minutes if you can — out of your day just for yourself and connect with the nature around you

My Kokum would stop in her tracks and tell us, "nitohtamok," which translates to "listen" in Cree. For that period of time, we would just listen to the loudness of silence.

I do believe that what she was teaching us was to respect our physical bodies and listen to what they had to say. To be able to honour your body and mind with silence and go deep within ourselves and picture what we wanted for that time and space. By doing that we stay connected to who we are and we listen to what are bodies are saying. Find peace in silence and the calmness will soothe your soul. That is good for you to take time to be at one with yourself. Don't be afraid of silence, it can teach us a lot about ourselves.

I can still hear my Kokum saying "nitohtâso," which I interpret to mean, "Listen to yourself, your body and by doing so that is the kind of life you will envision." So be good to yourselves and envision a good life for you and all those you love but especially those that don't feel love for they are the ones that need it the most. Hy-Hy.

Myrtle Calahaisen, Cree Elder, Edmonton, Alberta



## Irritants at Work

### What to avoid

- ✦ Avoid oil-based paint, glue and fumes during painting and carpentry
- ✦ Avoid being around *mould* if you work in forestry or logging
- ✦ Avoid castor bean, olive oil cake, flax and rapeseed oil if you work in the oil industry
- ✦ Avoid inhaling diesel exhaust from trucks



### How to prevent

- ✦ Protect yourself and wear gloves, a mask, and safety glasses when handling strong scented chemicals
- ✦ Read labels and follow safety instructions when working with chemicals and toxic items
- ✦ If you work with those items indoors, make sure that the area is well-ventilated and wear a protective mask

### What else you can do

- ✦ Wipe surfaces with a damp cloth or mop to pick up dust
- ✦ Sand and/or carve wood antler, bone and soap stone outside, when possible
- ✦ Store hides that have been recently tanned outdoors

## MOST IMPORTANT

Try to work in open areas that are well ventilated. Speak to your health care provider if your symptoms get worse at work





## Road Dust

### What to avoid

- ✦ Stay away from road dust whenever possible
- ✦ Tell your kids not to play on unpaved roads

### How to prevent

- ✦ Close car windows when travelling
- ✦ Spray water over the road near your home to keep the road dust down
- ✦ Keep windows closed to stop road dust from entering your home

### What else you can do

- ✦ Talk to your community leaders and/or Band Council if road dust near your home is affecting your *asthma*



## Outdoor Burning and Forest Fires

### What to avoid

- ✦ Stay away from outdoor burning like forest and grass fires whenever possible
- ✦ If you are near a forest or grass fire, stay indoors and avoid breathing in smoke and ashes
- ✦ Avoid clean-up activities in areas where dust or soot are present

### How to prevent

- ✦ Keep windows closed to stop smoke from entering your home
- ✦ Talk to your health care provider about how to change your *asthma* medication if you are exposed to outdoor burning and/or forest fires







## Making Your Home Healthy

A damp home is bad for lung health because it provides an environment for *mould* and *dust mites* to grow. It is advised to keep humidity in your home between **40% to 50%**. You can use a tool called a *hygrometer* to measure the humidity level in your home.



- ✦ If the humidity is above 50%, it is important to use a *dehumidifier*. A *dehumidifier* is an appliance that *reduces* the moisture in the air. Make sure you clean the *dehumidifier* regularly as recommended in the instructions for use
- ✦ If the humidity is below 30%, you may need an appliance such as a humidifier or vaporizer to increase moisture in the air

*I am not a smoker so when I am around smokers I get a reaction so my house is smoke-free.*

*Wanda St. Arnault, High Level, Alberta*

### What to avoid

- ✦ Avoid using air fresheners, scented candles, air sprays, aerosols, and other sprayed household chemicals whenever possible
- ✦ Avoid using bleach for cleaning and laundry
- ✦ Avoid household products with strong scents when cleaning
- ✦ Try not to use scented personal products, deodorants, fragrances, and hair sprays
- ✦ Avoid strong chemicals to kill unwanted insects from plants and flowers near your home

### How to prevent

- ✦ Use natural products like baking soda, vinegar mixed with water, lemon juice, or olive oil to clean your home
- ✦ Make sure furnaces, fireplaces and stoves are vented to the outdoors to avoid smoke fumes inside your home



### What else you can do

- ✦ Make sure to maintain properly and clean regularly your air equipment including air exchange units, air conditioners, venting systems, etc.



# Quiz

What can I do to make my home a healthier environment?

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There are many things you can do. For example: avoid carpet and use area rugs instead, keep an eye on the humidity

It is important to avoid your *asthma triggers* in order to better manage and control your *asthma*? True or false

True

Can I use soap and water to get rid of small patches of *mould*? Yes or no

Yes, you can as long as they are not bigger than the size of a regular garbage bag folded in half



My allergies act up any time of day, any time of year. I never actually sat down and wrote [which] allergies are affecting me this week. [This] sounds like a good idea [and] then maybe I could figure out what triggers these allergy symptoms.

Wanda St. Arnault,  
High Level, Alberta



A black and white photograph of three tipis in a field. The tipis are arranged in a line, with the one on the right being the most prominent. The field is filled with tall grass, and the background shows a line of trees or a distant horizon. The overall mood is serene and natural.

# ASTHMA MEDICATION

- Medication is the best way to control your *asthma*
- There are two kinds of medication:  
*controller medication* or *reliever medication*
- Your health care provider may prescribe you both

# ASTHMA MEDICATION

You can *reduce* your *asthma* symptoms when you avoid your *triggers* and change your surroundings. But often, that is not enough to completely *control* your *asthma*. That's why it is important to use your medication regularly as recommended by your doctor or nurse. Medication is the best way to control your *asthma*.

It is important to treat the underlying cause of *asthma* rather than just stop the coughing. *Cough suppressants* should not be used to treat your *asthma* symptoms unless prescribed by your doctor.

Children under six years old should not take *cough suppressants*. Please seek guidance from your health care provider.

Your doctor can give you two kinds of medication:

✦ *Controller medication*

✦ *Reliever medication*

Your doctor may also give you a combination medication which contains both a controller and a reliever medication.







[Cory has asthma], but that didn't deter him from staying active... Cory knows that he has to take his medication.

I checked with our pharmacists to see if it was possible to get two sets of inhalers and to leave one in school and one at home.

Roberta Jackson speaking about her son Cory Jackson, Cree Hockey Player and Cowboy, Whitefish Lake First Nation, Good Fish, Alberta



## Controller Medication

- ✦ *Controller medication* (see Table 1) treats the swelling in your airways
- ✦ You know that the *controller medication* is working because after awhile you will have fewer symptoms
- ✦ Remember to take your *controller medication* even if you are not having symptoms
- ✦ If you stop taking your *controller medication*, your airways may start swelling again

## Table 1 – Controller Medication

Inhaled Corticosteroids (ICSs)
<b>Examples</b>
<i>Flovent®</i>
<i>Pulmicort®</i>
<i>QVAR®</i>
<i>Alvesco®</i>
<b>Important Information</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ICSs <i>reduce</i> the swelling in your airways so they become less sensitive to <i>triggers</i></li><li>• ICSs <i>reduce mucous</i> in your airways so your airways become less sensitive to <i>triggers</i></li><li>• Be patient! It may take days or weeks after you start taking ICSs before you feel better</li><li>• The more you use your <i>controller medication</i>, the less you will need your <i>reliever medication</i></li><li>• Sometimes when you take ICSs, you may get a scratchy voice or a throat infection called thrush. This may be because you are not using your puffer properly. Using a <i>spacer</i> can help</li><li>• Also, rinsing out your mouth with water after using your ICSs will help. You should speak with your doctor or nurse as well</li></ul>

Leukotriene Receptor Antagonists (LTRAs)
<b>Examples</b>
<i>Singular®</i>
<i>Accolate®</i>
<b>Important Information</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unlike ICSs, LTRAs are not steroids</li><li>• LTRAs <i>reduce</i> the swelling in your airways</li><li>• You can get LTRAs as tablets, chewable tables or granules for children and take them once a day</li><li>• Your doctor will give you LTRAs by themselves or, sometimes, with ICSs</li><li>• Sometimes when you take LTRAs, you may have <i>nausea</i>, get a headache or behaviour change</li></ul>



## Reliever Medication

- ✦ Reliever medication (see Table 2) helps you feel better fast during an *asthma* attack or flare-up
- ✦ Reliever medication relaxes the muscles around your airways and helps you breathe normally within minutes
- ✦ The effect of short-acting relievers lasts about 4 hours, while long-acting relievers lasts about 12 hours
- ✦ Long acting bronchodilators should only be used if you are also taking an inhaled corticosteroid

## Table 2 – Reliever Medication

Short-Acting Relievers	Important Information
<b>Examples</b> <i>Ventolin®HFA</i> <i>Airomir®</i> <i>Bricanyl®</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These medications are not LABAs. They are short-acting and last about 4 hours</li> <li>• Sometimes you may also get a headache, feel your hands shake, feel nervous and have a fast heartbeat when you take them</li> </ul>
Long-Acting Beta2-Agonists (LABAs)	Important Information
<b>Examples</b> <i>Oxeze®</i> <i>Serevent®</i> <i>Foradil®</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LABAs relax the muscle around your airways for up to 12 hours</li> <li>• Severent cannot be used as a rescue medication</li> <li>• Sometimes when you take LABAs, you may also get a headache, feel your hands shake, feel nervous and have a fast heartbeat. Children who take LABAs may get over-excited</li> </ul>



## QUICK TIPS

- Keep your *prescriptions* up-to-date
- Keep a record of when your medication is no longer good (*expiry date*)
- Carry an additional puffer on hand (for children, keep a spare medication in their school bag during the school year)
- Store medication in a dry environment at room temperature and avoid storing it in the bathroom
- Discuss with your health care provider if you are taking any traditional medications

## Combination Medication

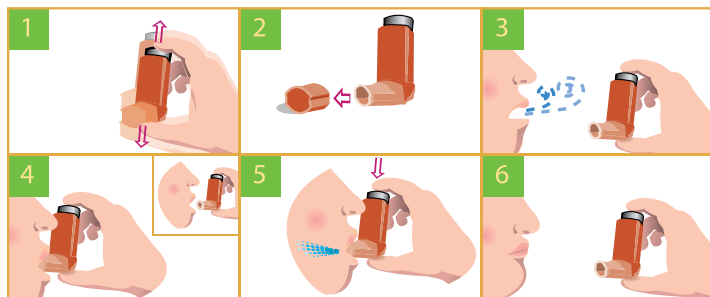
- ✦ *Combination medication* (see Table 3) contains a controller and long-acting reliever in one single inhaler.
- ✦ The most common combination has two medications:
  - ICS, a medication used to *reduce* the swelling in your airways
  - LABA, a medication to relax the muscles around your airways

**Table 3 – Combination Medication**

Combination Medication	Important Information
<b>Examples</b> Symbicort® Advair® Zenhale®	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LABAs and ICSs can come as one <i>combination medication</i></li> <li>• Sometimes when you take <i>combination medication</i>, you may also get a scratchy throat and voice, and have a fast heartbeat</li> </ul>

There are different types of inhalers including aerosol puffers (metered dose inhalers or MDI) and dry powder inhalers (diskus and turbuhaler).

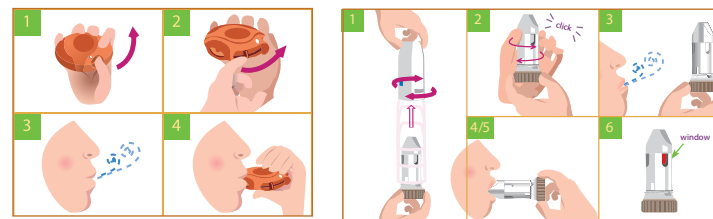
### Steps to use your puffer (metered dose inhaler):



1. Shake your puffer well.
2. Remove the cap.
3. Put the puffer into a *spacer* (if applicable) see page 79.
4. Breathe out, away from your puffer.
5. Bring your puffer and/or *spacer* to your mouth and breathe in slowly while pressing the top of the puffer once.
6. Remove the puffer from your mouth, and hold your breath for 10 seconds, then breathe out.

If you need a second puff, wait 30 seconds, shake your puffer again, and repeat steps 2 to 5.

### Steps to use your dry powder inhaler (diskus or turbuhaler):



1. Open your inhaler:
  - To open your diskus, push the thumb grip until it “clicks” into place. Slide the lever away from you.
  - To open your turbuhaler, unscrew the cap and take it off. Twist the coloured grip of the inhaler as far as it will go, then twist it all the way back. You’ve done it right when you hear a “click.”
2. Breathe out, away from the inhaler.
3. Place the mouthpiece around your mouth.
4. Breathe in deeply through your mouth.
5. Remove the inhaler from your mouth.
6. Hold your breath for 10 seconds, then breathe out slowly.
7. Close your inhaler:
  - Push thumb grip to close the diskus cover.
  - When finished, replace the cap of the turbuhaler.



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Asthma Medication

### If I feel better, do I still have to take daily medication?

Yes. Even if your symptoms are mild, you still need a low dose of *controller medication* every day. This is because:

- ✦ Even mild symptoms can *reduce* your quality of life
- ✦ Swelling in your airways may damage your *lungs* forever
- ✦ If you start having symptoms again, it means:
  - Your airways are swelling again
  - You are not controlling your *asthma* because you are not managing it all the time
  - Your next *asthma* attack could be severe

Do not change or stop taking your *controller medications* until you talk to your doctor or nurse.

### If I am pregnant, should I still take my *asthma* medication?

Yes. When you breathe well, your baby breathes well and stays healthy. So it is very important for you to control your *asthma* well during your pregnancy. Your *asthma* medication should not affect your pregnancy. Discuss all your medications with your doctor or nurse.

### Why is a puffer the best way to take *asthma* medication?

When you use a puffer, the medication goes straight to where the swelling is—your airways. But the medication only works if it actually gets there. So you must learn to use your puffer properly.



## How do I know if I am using my puffer correctly?

Using your puffer properly is very important. This is how your medication reaches your airways. Ask your health care provider to check that you are using your puffer properly. Show them how you are using your puffer.

## What is the difference between an aerosol puffer and a dry powder puffer?

An aerosol puffer, also called a “metered dose inhaler,” acts like a spray can. When you push down on the can, a dose of medication is pushed out. You breathe in the medication.

With a dry powder puffer, you suck the medication out of the container and into your *lungs* when you breathe in.

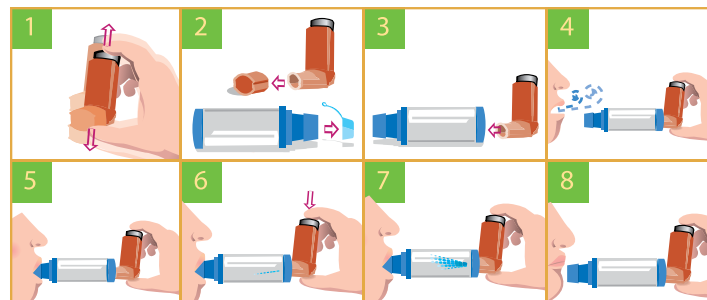
## What is a *spacer*? Should I be using one?

If you are not using your aerosol puffer properly, the medication is not reaching your airways. A *spacer* can help. A *spacer* is a tube that you attach to the puffer. You breathe the medication in from the tube instead of directly from the puffer. The *spacer* helps the medication reach your airways more easily.

Your pharmacist, doctor or nurse can tell you if you are using your puffer properly. Ask them if you are not sure. They can also recommend the best device for you. Children should use *spacers* with their puffers.

## Steps to use your MDI with a *spacer*:

1. Shake the inhaler well before use (three or four shakes).
2. Remove the cap from your inhaler, and from your *spacer*, if it has one.
3. Put the inhaler into the *spacer*.
4. Breathe out, away from the *spacer*.
5. Bring the *spacer* to your mouth, put the mouthpiece between your teeth and close your lips around it.
6. Press the top of your inhaler once.
7. Breathe in slowly until you’ve taken a full breath  
If you hear a whistle sound, you are breathing in too fast.  
Slowly breathe in.
8. Hold your breath for about ten seconds, then breathe out.





# QUIZ

**Do I only need to take my medication when I am having trouble breathing?**

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No, it is important to manage your *asthma* all the time.

**Should I use my medication if I'm pregnant?**

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Yes, this will help your baby to breathe as well.

# STRENGTH THROUGH CULTURE

*First of all, I think in life everyone faces difficult challenges at different times... In saying that I believe that we are blessed with a language that is instructive as well as spiritual and I use Cree as an example when I say: When you are Cree you are born to win. The sacred teachings of our people are imbedded in our languages: To love each other-Sâkîhitowin; to help each other-wîcîhitowin; and to support each other-mîsohkamâtowin... Notice the last five letters are to win, not to lose.*

*In taking that next step with that teaching, you say, "Alright as a people, when we work together, put our minds together, either as individuals or as a nation we can begin to plan and organize a plan of action to deal with the challenges we face..." You always have an objective or a focus in mind that you are working towards." I want to be healthy as an individual, physically mentally, and emotionally fit." To be physically strong in terms of culturally and spiritually, will*

*lead us to think that if we got our minds together, collectively on a common purpose.*

*We can meet all our challenges, for example asthma and allergies as a challenge. We know that there have been some successful individuals, not withstanding that they have had this challenge in front of them with asthma but they have been able to succeed! They have been able to go through hurdles. And I know professional athletes have been able to do that. So if they can do it, we can do it, and most importantly we as individuals and as nations we can do it! To be able to face our medical challenges or physical challenges if we were to put our minds together and work actively towards a common goal in controlling asthma and not have asthma control you!*

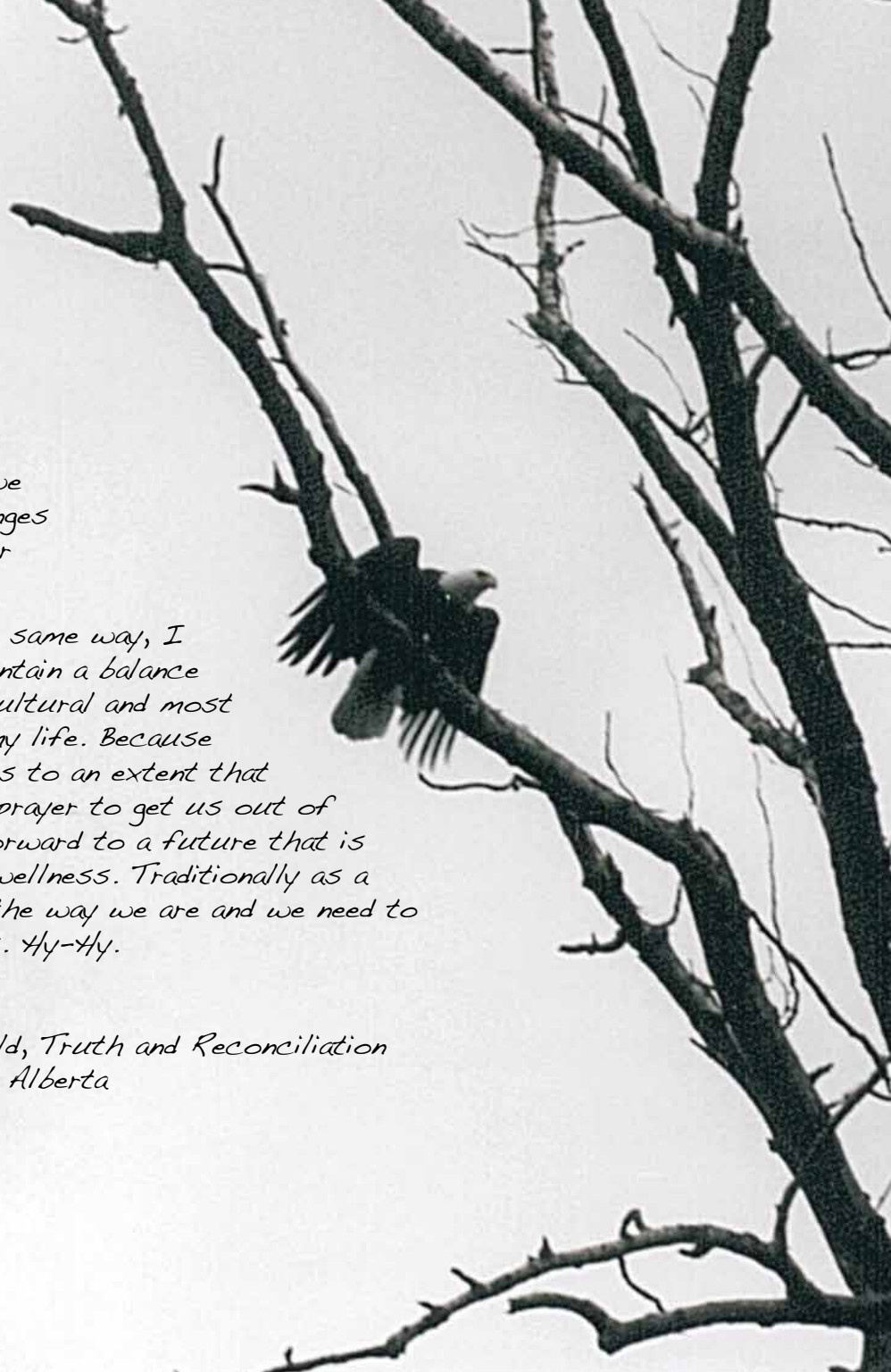
*We are really blessed because culturally we have been able to survive as a people. Spiritually we have tremendous blessings of our spiritual strength as people. These are both supported by Indigenous*

languages. And the instructions behind those languages teach us to be healthy. And to meet a negative situation where ever we are with a positive result. In saying all this is to encourage us to look at things together for the positive good that we can do, and not to give up the challenges because of negative circumstances or consequences.

Medical challenges I deal with in the same way, I try to stay very physically active, maintain a balance with the mental aspect of my life, cultural and most importantly the spiritual aspect of my life. Because sometimes medical challenges face us to an extent that we rely on the spiritual strength of prayer to get us out of the situation so that we can look forward to a future that is more healthy, positive and all-round wellness. Traditionally as a people that is the way we were and the way we are and we need to continue to maintain those strengths. *Hy-Hy.*

Chief Wilton Littlechild

Commissioner Chief Wilton Littlechild, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Ermineskin First Nation, Alberta



# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

*Air Quality Health Index (AQHI):* a scale developed by Environment Canada and Health Canada to help people understand what the air quality around them means to their health.

*Allergic:* being *allergic* means that your body reacts to something around you (called an allergen). When your body comes in contact with the allergen, your immune system can react to the allergen. This causes an allergic reaction. An *allergic* reaction results in release of histamine from your body's immune cells (mast cells). This causes swelling and symptoms of sneezing, hives, congestion, itchy eyes and a runny nose. This can make your *asthma* worse.

*Allergic Trigger (Allergen):* an *allergic* trigger is anything, which starts or “*triggers*” an *allergic* reaction. An *allergic* reaction can make your *asthma* symptoms worse. Common *allergic triggers* (allergens) are: *dust mites, mould, animal dandruff, pollen*, etc. It is important to stay away from your *allergic triggers*.

*Asthma:* *chronic* swelling of the airways making it hard to breathe.

*Beta Blockers:* a medication used to manage heart disease.

*Bronchoconstriction:* tightening of the bronchial airways.

*Chronic:* means all the time. Your *asthma* is a *chronic inflammatory* disease of the airways. Even though you have *asthma* all the time, you can control your *asthma* by taking your medications and staying away from your *asthma triggers*.

*Combination Medication:* this is a type of *asthma* medication with both a controller and a long acting reliever in a single puffer. It *reduces* the swelling and relaxes the muscles around your airways.

*Controller Medication:* this is a type of *asthma* medication that treats the swelling in your airways. It is used regularly as prescribed, even when you are not having symptoms to help control your *asthma*.

*Cough Suppressants:* medications that are taken to stop your coughing. Children should not take these unless prescribed.

*Dander:* animal dandruff – flakes of skins under the animal's fur.

*Dehumidifier:* a household appliance that gets rid of moisture in the air.

*Diarrhea/the Runs:* when you have loose bowel movements.

*Dust Mites:* small insect that lives in bedding and furniture. You can't see these with the human eye.

*Epinephrine Auto-injector:* pen-like needle used to give yourself medication.

*Expiry Date:* when food or medication expires it may have gone bad or no longer be helpful.

*Flu Shot:* a yearly vaccine that helps prepare your body to fight the flu.

*Hand Sanitizer:* a gel or foam you can use to clean your hands when soap and water are not available.

*HEPA Filter:* some vacuum cleaners have this to filter out small particles.

*Hydrate:* to add water to something.

*Hygrometer:* a tool that measures indoor humidity.

*Inflammation or Inflammatory:* this means swelling.

*Irritant:* an *irritant* is something that causes temporary swelling. *Irritants* cause your airways to swell and make your *asthma* symptoms worse. *Irritants* include: tobacco smoke, poor indoor and outdoor air quality, outdoor burning and forest fires, etc.

*Lungs:* the organs in our chest that we use to breathe.

*Mould:* *mould* is a fungus that lives in humid places. *Mould* is often black or white. Being around it can make your *asthma* worse.

*Mucous:* liquid substance also known as snot.

*Nausea:* when you feel like throwing up.

*Nicotine:* found in the tobacco plant. This chemical makes you want more cigarettes.

*Non-Allergic Trigger:* these are things that irritate the airways and make your *asthma* symptoms worse. Some examples are colds and flus, stress and exercise.

*Non-Traditional Tobacco Use:* includes cigarettes, pipes.

*Over-the-Counter Medicine:* medicine that you can buy without a doctor's prescription.

*Pollen:* a fine powder that comes from trees, weeds and grasses.

*Prescription Medicine:* medicine that you can only get with a doctor's order.

*Reduce:* to make or use less of something.

*Reliever Medication:* this is a type of *asthma* medication that relaxes your airways' muscles and helps you breathe normally within minutes of an *asthma* attack or flare up.

*Respiratory System:* includes the *lungs* and airways that allow us to breathe air in and out.

*Second-Hand Smoke:* smoke that comes from a burning cigarette, pipe or cigar as well as what is breathed out by the smoker.

*Spacer:* a tube that could be attached to a puffer. It helps medicine get to your airways.

*Spores:* small pieces that come from *mould* and float in the air.

*Sulphites:* these are often used to preserve food (dried fruits, preserved radish and dried potato products).

*Third-Hand Smoke:* smoke that sticks to hair, skin, clothes, fabric, carpet, furniture and toys long after the smoker has put out the cigarette.

*Triggers:* a trigger is anything that starts or “triggers” your *asthma* symptoms. There are two types of *triggers:* *allergic triggers* (allergens) and *non-allergic triggers*.

*Ventilation:* is the process of “changing” or replacing air in any space to provide better indoor air quality.





# RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Be sure to speak with your community health care provider if you need more information about managing your *asthma*. You can take this workbook with you and discuss any questions you have.

## Learn more about your *asthma* from the Asthma Society of Canada:

- For more information on *asthma* and its management, contact **BREATHE** (Building Respiratory Education and Awareness for First Nations, Inuit and Métis: Tools for Health Empowerment) of the Asthma Society of Canada. You can order additional resources on *asthma* and/or talk to a Certified Asthma/Respiratory Educator who can provide additional information and support. Visit [www.asthma.ca](http://www.asthma.ca) for more information about *asthma* or [www.asthmameds.ca](http://www.asthmameds.ca) for more information on how to use your puffer



## For more information on *mould*:

- Visit Health Canada at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnihah-spnia/promotion/public-publique/home-maison/mould-moisissure-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnihah-spnia/promotion/public-publique/home-maison/mould-moisissure-eng.php) and look for resources developed for First Nations communities.

## For more information on *asthma* and allergy friendly certification program:

- Visit the Asthma and Allergy friendly certification program at [www.asthmaandallergyfriendly.ca](http://www.asthmaandallergyfriendly.ca) for more information on various products like bedding (mattress covers, pillow covers), cleaning products (air cleaning devices, vacuum cleaners, cleaning products, washing machines) and stuffed toys.

## For more information on the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI):

- Visit [www.airhealth.ca](http://www.airhealth.ca)

- You can also download a tool called a widget to your computer—it will remain on your computer's desktop and provide you with up-to-date information on local weather, humidity, and the AQHI. You can find it on the web site [www.asthma.ca/widget](http://www.asthma.ca/widget). You can ask your community health care provider to help you with this.





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