

# Asthma Signs and Symptoms

People with asthma have sensitive airways that swell and narrow when exposed to triggers. Asthma affects each person differently, but almost everyone with asthma feels warning signs and symptoms before an asthma episode begins. Though warning signs are different for everyone, there are some important signs of which to be aware. Recognizing your warning signs and symptoms can help you take the right steps to prevent your asthma episode from getting worse. Below, we outline common warning signs and action steps to take based on their level of severity.

## Level I

### Early episode warning signs:

- Shortness of breath
- Coughing
- Feeling tired or weak
- Itchy throat
- Watery eyes
- Upset stomach

### How to respond:

- Move away from triggers.
- Take your quick-relief medication to relieve symptoms in 15 minutes.
- Monitor your warning signs and make sure your symptoms don't worsen.

## Level II

### More serious signs and symptoms:

- Medications are not working or do not last
- Increased coughing
- Tightness in the chest
- Wheezing
- Inability to participate in usual activities (work, school, exercise, etc.)

### How to respond:

- Follow the same steps as with Level I.
- If symptoms worsen or are not better within 15 minutes of using medication, follow your asthma action plan and consider calling 911.

## Level III

### Severe signs and symptoms:

- Severe shortness of breath
- Difficulty walking or talking
- Blue, gray, or pale lips and nails

### How to respond:

- Call 911. Any ONE of these symptoms requires immediate medical attention.
- If you have not already, take your quick-relief medication.