

eAsthma Tracker

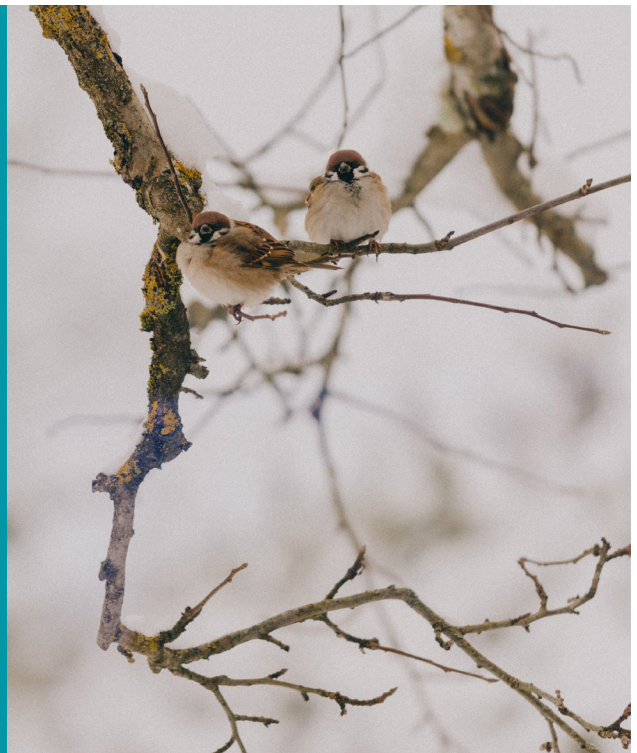
.....

# NEWSLETTER

.....

Issue 4

February  
2022



- .....
- 02** Winter Allergies and Asthma
  - 04** 5 Tips to Help Control Allergic Asthma
  - 05** How Do I Know if My Asthma is Under Control?
  - 06** Affording Asthma Medications

# Winter Allergies and Asthma

by Aubrey and Heidi Shunk

Winter is not typically the time most people focus on their allergies and asthma symptoms; however, for some people, winter is actually the time when their symptoms worsen. Why is that? Here are a few factors that may be affecting your asthma and allergies during the winter months.

## Cold Air

Being out in the cold air can cause your asthma symptoms to flare up by irritating your bronchial tubes. Your bronchial tubes take the air and oxygen you breathe and bring it to the lungs to be distributed throughout the rest of your body. When cold air reaches your bronchial tubes, they naturally start to close because that cold air is not the normal temperature your body is used to. Because of this the cold air can cause shortness of breath and simply just make it harder to breathe.

Although the cold air may impact your asthma, that does not mean you need to stay inside all winter long! Simply using a scarf or facemask that loosely covers your nose and mouth can trap some of the moisture that you already have in your body and help keep your symptoms under control.

## Cold and Flu symptoms

Most people will find that when they are sick, their asthma and allergy symptoms also become worse. Although sickness in the wintertime is not something you can always avoid, it is something you can talk to your doctor about ahead of time and come up with a plan. Your doctor may adjust current medication or even add temporary medications -such as the use of a nebulizer- for a short period of time.



## Indoor Heating

During the winter months, most of us are using a furnace to heat our homes, which invites a whole new set of problems. Things like pet dander, dust mites and even mold are regularly being blown throughout our homes. There are some simple things you can do to keep this from becoming a problem.

First, regularly replace your furnace filter; this will ensure maximum airflow and trap some of those pesky allergens and keep them from getting in the air you breathe. In the winter months, we also find ourselves – and even our pets - spending more time indoors. Keeping a regular cleaning routine and vacuuming more than we may in the summer will help minimize the presence of mold, pet dander and dust mites.

## **Winter Allergies and Asthma Continued...**

Finally, if you are someone who uses a wood-burning stove or fireplace, make sure that it is well ventilated. Although these may be a good heat source, the smoke from the fire may make it more difficult to breathe if your chimney or flue is not allowing the smoke to properly escape.

### **Inversion**

Air quality in the winter months can cause problems for people suffering from asthma and allergies. Although there is nothing we can personally do to change the weather outside, we can limit the amount of time we spend outdoors exposed to the contaminants in the air. Staying indoors at times when the air quality is low will keep your airways from being adversely affected.

Even though the winter months invite different challenges for people suffering from asthma and allergies, there are simple things you can do to make your symptoms more manageable and less extreme. Bundle up when going outdoors. Always

continue taking daily medicine. Track your asthma symptoms. Stay indoors when the air quality is bad. Keep a good cleaning routine. You might even want to consider investing in a humidifier,

***“The winter months invite different challenges [but] there are simple things you can do to make your symptoms more manageable.”***

which puts the moisture you need back in the air. Be sure to change the filter regularly on your humidifier and keep it clean.

Implementing a few easy changes in your winter routine can ensure that you and your family can enjoy this winter season with less interruptions from your asthma and allergies.



# 5 Tips to Help Control Allergic Asthma

by Lis Malmgren

## 1. Keep a Trigger Journal

Write down where you were and what you were doing when your asthma symptoms flared up; you can use the Comments box in the eAsthma Tracker weekly test for this! Once you've identified possible triggers, you can start taking steps to avoid them.



## 2. Stay Away from Strong Smells



Did you know that strong smells can trigger your asthma? Pay attention to how your body feels next time you go into that candle shop, or by that perfume counter, and avoid strong smells when you can.

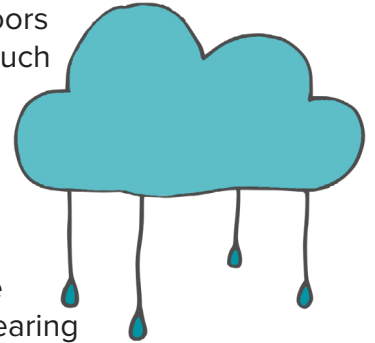
## 3. Exercise Carefully

If you notice asthma symptoms when you're exercising, talk to your doctor about using your rescue inhaler before you exercise as a preventative measure. It can also be a good idea to avoid outdoor exercise – especially when the air quality is bad – and opt for things like indoor spin and dance classes instead.



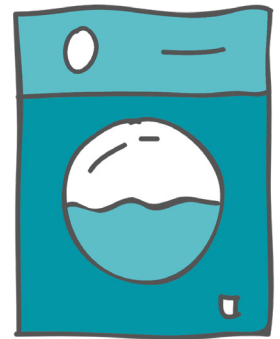
## 4. Watch the Air Quality

Check the air quality before you leave the house each day. When the air quality is poor, stay inside with your doors and windows shut as much as possible. If you have to go outside when the air quality is bad – such as in the summer during wildfire season or the winter during the inversion – consider wearing a respirator mask to protect your lungs.



## 5. Keep Dust Under Control

Dust and dust mites are common allergic asthma triggers. Using mattress and pillow covers as well as regularly washing your bedding in hot water will help keep the dust mites at bay. Also consider replacing your carpet with a hard surface if possible and use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter. Air purifiers with HEPA filters can also be helpful.





# How Do I Know if My Asthma is Under Control?

by Michelle Frazier

When it comes to taking care of you or your child's asthma, there can be so many questions. How do you know if your asthma is under control? How do you know if the medications you are using are helping? Are you on the right dose? Is there a certain time of year when your asthma tends to get worse? Are there things that trigger your asthma? Sometimes, these questions can be difficult to answer.

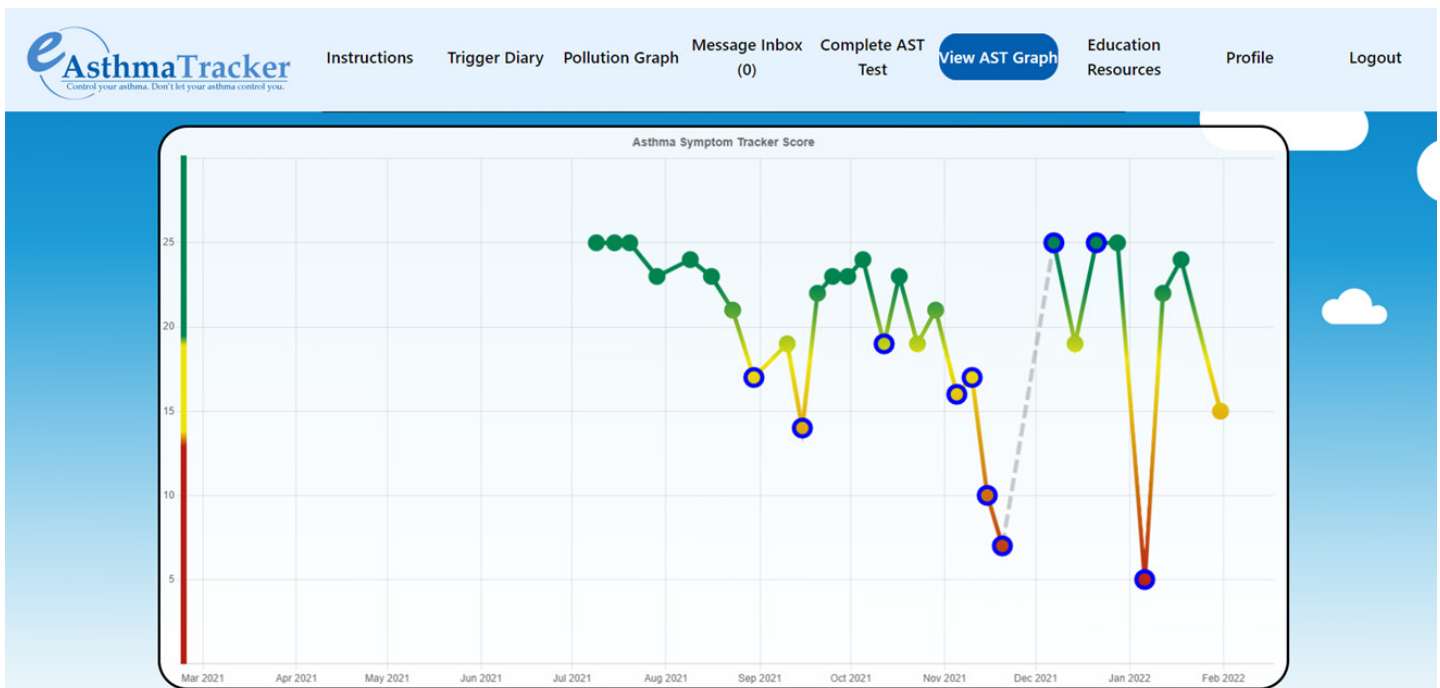
When you go to see your healthcare provider, they may have you answer questions about your asthma.

These questions may include how often you have asthma symptoms, how frequently you use your medication, or if your asthma symptoms interrupt

you during the day or at night. Your provider will then use your answers to help determine how well controlled your asthma is, which will in turn help them decide how best to treat your asthma.

While answers to these questions can be informative, they are only one small piece of the puzzle, as they only capture a single moment in time. That's where the eAsthma Tracker comes in. When you track your asthma symptoms consistently using the eAsthma Tracker, you get a clearer picture of how severe your symptoms are, and how and when they act over a long period of time. You may also see trends that can help you determine triggers and other factors that may influence your asthma, which can help you and your provider know if your asthma really is well controlled and help avoid visits to the hospital in the future.

*Did you know that the eAsthma Tracker has been proven to help with asthma? The evidence shows that those who use the eAsthma Tracker have better asthma control.*



# Affording Asthma Medications

by Dr. Joseph Johnson



With the right medications, asthma can be well controlled. Often, these medications can be hard for families to afford, thus compromising their ability to successfully treat their children with asthma. Especially now, with many high-deductible plans, many people are required to pay the full price for medications, which can be very expensive.

Let me first explain two concepts related to medication coverage on any insurance plan:

## 1. Deductible

This is the amount that you are required to pay prior to your insurance paying any amount for office visits, labs, or medications. Usually, plans have an individual deductible and a family deductible. For example, if the plan you choose has a \$2000 deductible for individuals and \$7000 deductible for families, each individual will pay \$2000 prior to insurance covering costs but after that, their costs will be

mostly covered. If you have four family members, each will be required to pay \$2000 until costs add up to the family limit of \$7000, and then costs will be mostly covered. For many insurance plans, the deductible will include doctor visits and medications, so these are combined costs you must pay until the deductible is met. Under Obamacare, preventative care (e.g., well-child visits and vaccines) are covered 100%, so this is not a part of your deductible.

## 2. Copay

Some insurance plans use a copay for office visits and medications. You still might have a deductible, but you are not required to pay the full deductible before insurance covers some of the costs of care. A copay means that you are required to pay a certain amount or percentage of the cost of these visits/medications, and the insurance covers the rest. Again, once the deductible is met, the insurance covers more or sometimes all of the costs. For example, let's say you bring your child in for an asthma check, and the visit costs \$100. Under your plan, your copay is \$35 (*this is outlined in the details of your plan*), so you pay that amount, and the insurance will pay the remaining \$65.

For medication coverage, there is usually a program called a **"tier"** program. The lower the tier, the less you pay for the medication. Usually there are four levels, or tiers, often called Tier 1, 2, 3, and 4. For example, let's say your medication costs \$150 cash price, but it is covered in Tier 1; you might be paying \$20 (*this is outlined in the details of your plan*),

## Affording Asthma Medications Continued...

and the insurance covers the remaining cost. However, if this particular medication is Tier 4, you might be required to pay 50% of the costs (or \$75) and the insurance covers the rest. Like the high deductible plans, all preventative care (e.g., well-child visits and vaccines) are covered 100% by insurance.

After that long explanation, let me talk about asthma medications. These medications have a lot of technology behind their development and cost a lot of money for drug companies to manufacture, which means they often have a high cost, even if we prescribe generics. What can be done to help with these costs? Let me give a few suggestions:

### 1. Know your insurance plan formulary

A **formulary** is a list of medications and which tier they are on. In other words, your insurance plan has drugs that are preferred, which they will cover at a lower cost than others. You should be able to access these lists online. If your provider prescribes a brand-name medication not covered well by your insurance, switching to another brand-name at a lower tier on your formulary will help save on costs. With asthma, there are generally several equivalent medications that we can use to treat your child and knowing which one is on your formulary will help cut costs.

### 2. Ask about coupons

Many brand-name medications have **coupons** that your doctor or pharmacist can give you that will provide significant savings toward these medications. Often, you can search online on the website for the individual medications by name and find the coupons there. Print them out and drop them off at the pharmacy, and it should help decrease the cost.

### 3. Samples

Sometimes your doctor may have free **samples** given to them from the drug companies for the medications they prescribe. This is not as common now as it has been in the past, but it is worth asking when you are in the office.





### 4. Patient-assistance programs

Most drug companies have patient-assistance programs, where you provide information to the company about your family's income, and often they can provide the medication at a lower cost. It is like having a coupon, but it comes directly from the drug company. You can ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about these programs, and they often will be able to help you find out how to get these forms.

### 6. GoodRx

This is a great option for high-deductible plans. This is a website/app that will search most local pharmacies to find the cheapest price for medications. It gives coupons (different than those described above) that can provide substantial savings. Access it at [Goodrx.com](https://www.goodrx.com). When you get to the site, you type in the name of the drug you have been prescribed and it will pull up a list of pharmacies in your area and you can find which one is the cheapest.

You take the coupon from the GoodRx site to the pharmacy, and they can apply it there.

One of the six suggestions above will hopefully help make your child's asthma medicine more affordable. If you are still stressed, please remember to ask your doctor for help. We would rather know that you cannot afford your medications than assume that you are taking them when you are not. This problem can be worked out.



### 5. Health Savings Accounts

These are usually offered with high-deductible plans. This is a savings account from which you pay medical expenses. You are allowed to put money into this account from your paycheck and it is tax-free. Any money in the account can be used to pay for medical visits, medications, or other medical-related costs that are approved. You still may be paying for your medications, but at least you get a tax break on the money, so it is cheaper than paying for things after taxes.