

TAKING CHARGE

of your **asthma**
FALL/WINTER 2018



Medication and monitoring

Grab your peak flow meter for a better grip on asthma

If you have asthma, your doctor may have recommended that you use a peak flow meter. This small, hand-held device measures how air is flowing from your lungs. By keeping track of the measurements, you can monitor your asthma and tell if your asthma is getting worse. This can help your doctor make any necessary changes to your treatment. Peak flow meters are usually only recommended for people with moderate to severe asthma. Because they're small and easy to use, kids as young as 5 can be taught to use one.

When your asthma is under control, your doctor may have you measure your peak flow every day at the same time. If your asthma is not under control, your doctor may have you follow your peak flows more frequently. Here's how to use a peak flow meter. You might want to have your doctor watch you to make sure you're doing it right:

- Slide the arrow to the bottom of the scale to the lowest number. Stand up straight.
- Take the deepest breath you can. Make sure your tongue isn't blocking the mouthpiece. Blow out hard and fast in one breath—like blowing out a candle. Keep blowing until your lungs are almost out of air.
- Check where the arrow lands. Write down the number. Repeat the process two more times.
- Write down the highest of the three peak flow readings. This is your "personal best."

You and your doctor will have created an asthma action plan. As part of the action plan, it will show what numbers are normal for you. These numbers will fall into one of three zones:

- **Green zone** – little or few symptoms; OK to do your normal activities; take your regular long-term medicines.
- **Yellow zone** – some symptoms; you might need extra treatment. Follow your asthma action plan's instructions.
- **Red zone** – take your rescue medications and seek medical attention right away. Follow any other red-zone instructions from your action plan.

Follow all instructions your doctor gives you. You can breathe easier knowing you're taking charge of your asthma.

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Reducing risk

Protect yourself with flu and pneumococcal vaccines

Influenza ("the flu") can be a serious illness, especially for young children, older adults, pregnant women and people with certain chronic conditions. It can even cause hospitalization and death.

Fortunately, there is a vaccine to help protect against this virus. The vaccine can be given once a year and is the best way to reduce the risk of getting and spreading the flu.

Key facts about the flu vaccine

- Young children, especially those under 2 years old, adults 65 and older, pregnant women, nursing home residents and people with chronic health problems are at the highest risk for complications from the flu.
- Everyone 6 months old and above should get the flu vaccine every year. Try to get it as soon as it becomes available. Although it is best to get early, before the flu starts to spread in your community, getting it later can still help you and is important for your health.
- Babies under 6 months old should not get the flu vaccine.
- You can still get the flu even if you've been vaccinated—but you'll likely have a milder case.
- You cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine.
- Look for information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) before the start of the flu season. They may have additional recommendations about the flu vaccine at that time.

Pneumococcal disease is caused by bacteria and causes thousands of infections every year. While it's more commonly seen in children, it tends to cause serious complications in adults. There is a vaccine for pneumococcal disease.

Key facts about the pneumococcal vaccine

- Infants, young children and adults 65 years and older should get the pneumococcal vaccine.
- The vaccine is also recommended for people with long-term conditions such as asthma and heart disease; those with a weakened immune system; and smokers, among others.
- There are two pneumococcal vaccines. You may need both vaccines for complete coverage. Ask your doctor what is right for you.
- The pneumococcal vaccine should not be given to pregnant women or people with serious allergies to vaccine ingredients.

Diet and exercise

Tai Chi: A gentle way to move, meditate and de-stress

Learn more about this "moving meditation"



Tai chi is a mind-body exercise that was first used by Chinese monks to improve concentration and physical well-being. Today, some people may turn to it to help manage stress.

Sometimes called "moving meditation," tai chi's graceful and precise body movements can enhance balance, strength and coordination while helping you achieve better body awareness. Tai chi's movements are said to align the body, improve flexibility and increase energy flow called qi. It may also increase inner peace.

Combining breathing exercises with slow, gentle movements, tai chi is an activity for all age groups and all levels of fitness. It is ideal for just about anyone — children, adults of all ages or people with disabilities. Many of the movements can be adapted and performed in a sitting position.

Benefits of tai chi

Researchers have studied the benefits of tai chi. They may include:

- Increased bone health
- Cardiopulmonary fitness
- Increased quality of life
- Improved self-confidence
- Improved balance and fall prevention
- Improved strength, movement and flexibility

Another advantage of tai chi is that injuries from this activity are few. The movements are performed very slowly and are not strenuous if done correctly. Like any activity, your muscles may be sore when you first start tai chi. You may need to change or stay away from some of the movements if you are pregnant or have certain health conditions. Contact your doctor to discuss whether you should take a tai chi class.

If you are physically inactive or have a chronic health condition such as arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, pregnancy or other symptoms, check with your doctor before starting an exercise program. He or she can tell you what types of activities are safe and suitable for you.



Healthy coping

Stress management: Understanding your triggers is the first step

Can you identify some internal pressures and some outside factors that can cause you to feel stressed?

For most people, stress is a part of life. We feel it, complain about it and think about how we can get rid of it. But do we really understand what stress is and what we should do about it?

What is stress?

Simply put, stress is a physical response to a feeling, situation or event that interferes with your sense of well-being. The factors or emotions that cause you to feel anxious, tense or afraid are called stressors. Perception of stress is based on individual response. What may be stressful for one may be thrilling and challenging for another.

Internal vs. external stress

Some stressors are internal—stress-inducing thoughts or behaviors. These thoughts come from one's psychological mindset or expectations. Examples include putting pressure on yourself to be perfect or fear of public speaking. In more serious cases, internal stressors may lead to feelings of depression and anxiety.

Other stressors come from external factors, which are forces that you can't easily control. Examples include major life events, discovering your pay has been cut, urgent deadlines or an upcoming exam.

Internal and external stressors can have the same physical and psychological effects. You may have trouble sleeping, lose your appetite or lose interest in daily activities. You may be irritable, have headaches or stomach pains, or find that you cry easily.

Over time, chronic stress can be even more damaging. As your body stays in a state of alert, your immune system may be weakened. You could be more at risk for heart attack and stroke. Chronic stress may upset your reproductive and digestive systems.

As you can see, it's important to figure out the sources of your stress so you can start working toward a more healthy and relaxed mental state. It is helpful to learn coping skills to deal with stress—as stress is part of life.

Some examples of internal stressors

According to mental health experts at HelpGuide.org, here are some common internal stressors:

- Inability to accept uncertainty
- Pessimism
- Negative self-talk
- Unrealistic expectations
- Rigid thinking, lack of flexibility
- All-or-nothing attitude
- Needing to always be perfect

Some examples of external stressors

Here are some examples of external stressors, HelpGuide.org says:

- Major life changes, such as death of a loved one, divorce, military deployment, career that requires one to be away from home frequently
- Work or school
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial worries
- Being too busy
- Children and family

Left untreated, everyday stresses can lead to chronic stress. If you feel depressed or hopeless, seek help from your doctor or a mental health professional right away. The earlier you seek treatment, the greater the chances of successfully coping with stress.



Recipe

Apple raisin coffee cake

Makes 20 servings

Ingredients:

- Cooking spray
- 5 cups tart apples, cored, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ cup pecans, chopped
- ¼ cup canola oil
- 2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ cups whole-wheat pastry flour
- 1 ½ teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly spray a 13 x 9 x 2-inch pan with cooking spray.

In a large bowl, combine apples with sugar, raisins and pecans; mix well. Let stand 30 minutes.

Stir in oil, vanilla and egg. Sift together flours, soda and cinnamon; stir into apple mixture about ½ at a time, just enough to moisten dry ingredients. Turn batter into pan. Bake 35 to 40 minutes. Cool cake slightly before serving.



Managing stressors

Whether internal or external, stressors can usually be managed. Sometimes, you can learn to respond to the stressor differently. You may try stress-relief techniques. And sometimes, adjusting your thinking to a positive attitude can help. Eating a well-balanced diet and staying active with exercise also are important tools in helping manage stress. Please talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

Apples and raisins provide the moistness, which means less oil can be used in this low-cholesterol and low-sodium coffee cake.

Nutrition per serving:
2 x 2.5-inch slice

Calories	188
Fat	5 g
Saturated fat	0 g
Protein	5 g
Carbohydrates	31 g
Fiber	2 g
Sodium	.68 mg