

2021 Changes to Asthma Care from the Canadian Asthma Experts

Learn if your asthma is well controlled, how severe it is, if you are at risk for a flare-up, and what your asthma medication options are.

In 2021 the recommendations for asthma management were updated by The Canadian Thoracic Society, (CTS). CTS is a professional organization made up of lung health experts across the country that provide guidance on best practices for lung health management and care. This fact sheet highlights some of these changes to help you work with your health care provider(s) to best manage your asthma.

Asthma Control

People can expect even better asthma management than before. Almost all asthma can be well controlled. **The new guidelines have reduced the frequency of symptoms experienced and the number of times a reliever medication is required in order for asthma to be considered well controlled.**



Is your asthma well controlled?

- Do you have daytime symptoms (cough, wheeze, shortness of breath and/or chest tightness) more than 2 days per week?
- Do you require your reliever medication more than 2 times per week?
- Do you have mild nighttime symptoms more than once a week?
- Do you have any physical activity limitation?
- Do you miss any work or school due to your asthma?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, your asthma is not well controlled.

Please contact your health care provider, a Certified Asthma Educator or Certified Respiratory Educator. You may not be on enough medication, the right medication(s) or avoiding your asthma triggers (things that make your asthma worse).



Asthma Severity

Asthma severity is determined by the amount of medication required for asthma to be well controlled. The new guidelines have removed the category 'very severe asthma' and changed some of the treatment recommendations for certain severity classifications.

Do you know how severe your asthma is?

Asthma Severity Classifications	Treatment Recommended
Very mild asthma	Well controlled on reliever medication as needed (less than 2 times/week)
Mild asthma	Well controlled on a low dose of daily controller medication or leukotriene receptor antagonists (LTRA) - a controller medication in pill form, and a reliever medication as needed (less than 2 times/week)
Moderate asthma	Well controlled on a low or moderate dose of a daily controller medication and a reliever medication as needed (less than 2 times/week)
Severe asthma	On a high dose of two controller medications for the previous year or Needs systemic steroids (e.g., Prednisone) for 50% of the previous year to maintain control or Is uncontrolled despite this treatment



It is recommended that people with severe asthma be referred to a Respiriologist (lung specialist).

There are newer medications available by injection that may help control your severe asthma and improve your quality of life.



Asthma Flare-ups

Asthma flare-ups are worsening in asthma symptoms and control. Flare-ups should be mild and not often. **The new guidelines now assess your risk of an asthma flare-up to help determine what type of asthma medication would best manage your asthma.**

Are you at risk of an asthma flare-up?

- Do you have a history of severe asthma flare-ups?
 - Have you needed systemic steroids? (E.g., usually a pill form like prednisone taken for a short period of time)
 - Have you ever gone to the emergency department for your asthma?
 - Have you been hospitalized for your asthma?
- Is your asthma well controlled? (Review control questions above.)
- Do you use your reliever medication more than 2 times per week?
- Do you currently smoke?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are at a higher risk of having an asthma flare-up. Contact your prescribing health care provider to discuss your asthma medications.

New Medication Options for 'Very Mild' or 'Mild' Asthma

If you are 12 years and older with mild asthma, you may benefit from taking a medication called Symbicort (budesonide and formoterol fumarate) either daily or as needed. This medication is used as a controller and reliever because it has medications that act fast to relieve symptoms, but also prevents symptoms by reducing inflammation in the airways.

For those under the age of 12 years old with mild asthma, adding a controller medication that is used daily to prevent inflammation in the airways is recommended.

To learn more about asthma visit lungsask.ca/lungs/lung-diseases/asthma

