

Using the Asthma Action Plan Effectively



Simply giving a patient and family a written asthma action plan is **NOT** enough. In order for the asthma action plan to be effective, it **MUST** be taught. Here are some tips to help effectively teach your patients and families to use their asthma action plan.

- **ALWAYS** use the asthma action plan language (for example, "those sound like Yellow Zone symptoms" or "did you start your Yellow Zone quick relief medications?")
- Make sure that patients and families understand the asthma action plan and agree with the plan at each visit. Collaboration with patients and families is very important.
- Remind patients that the asthma action plan needs to be kept in places that are easily accessible. A copy of the asthma action plan should be with anyone that takes care of the patient (i.e., school nurse, teachers, coaches, babysitters, grandparents, etc.) The asthma action plan is very important. It gives instructions about how to properly handle an asthma episode.
- Be patient. Remember that even an adult needs to hear new information many times in order to remember a concept and translate it into an action. Allow patients to ask as many questions as they need.
- Use the asthma action plan as a teaching tool. When it is age appropriate, involve both the child and parent when discussing the action plan.

Here are some tips and specific teaching points for the different sections of the asthma action plan:

"I want to be able to" section: Help both the patient and parent think about and develop an asthma related goal. For example, what do patients want to be able to do that they find hard because of their asthma? (i.e. play outside, play football or go to college). Assure them that this is your goal, as well. This motivational technique is not only team building, but helps to develop patient buy-in and provides an incentive to improve care.

Controller medicines section: These are the medicines that will help the patient to control their asthma. They do not work quickly, but they work over a long period of time. Patients need to take these every day, regardless of what zone they are in. Similar to how sunscreen can help to prevent sunburn or lotion prevents dry skin, controller medicines work to prevent asthma flare ups.

Quick relief medicines section: These are the medicines that will help patients when they are having symptoms. They work very quickly, but for only a short amount of time. These are the medicines that patients should carry with them at all times because they will save their life in an asthma emergency. Patients should use these when they are in the Yellow and Red Zones.

Asthma triggers section: These are the things that make a patient's asthma worse. Review a patient's triggers with him and give recommendations for managing them (i.e., for pollen, know the pollen count and what to do when it's high). Tell a patient that when he knows he is going somewhere with a known trigger (i.e., grandma's house who has a dog), he can start his Yellow Zone medications in anticipation of that trigger. For example, the patient should start using quick relief medicine before getting to grandma's and continue it every 4 hours throughout his stay.

Green Zone section: A patient is in the Green Zone when he is feeling well and is able to do the things he likes to do. In the Green Zone, patients need to take controller medicines and avoid triggers that make asthma worse. If needed, the Green Zone is where information is located about pre-medicating before exercise to prevent symptoms.

Yellow Zone section: Talk about the symptoms of the Yellow Zone and the importance of early recognition and treatment. Talk to your patients and their families about their specific early warning signs. Emphasize the importance of continuing quick relief medicines until 24 hours after symptoms have subsided. Talk about what to do if symptoms persist. Remind patients that they must continue their controller medicines in this zone.

Red Zone section: Talk about the symptoms of the Red Zone. Make sure patients understand that these symptoms constitute a medical emergency. Talk about the steps to take when in the Red Zone and when to call for help.