



# Craig Hospital

Redefining Possible for People with Spinal Cord and Brain Injuries

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Craig Hospital  
3425 South Clarkson St.  
Englewood, Colorado 80113

[www.craighospital.org](http://www.craighospital.org)

For more information:

**Craig Hospital Nurse Advice Line**  
**1-800-247-0257**

## Asthma

**Definition:** Also known as “reactive airway disease,” asthma is a chronic respiratory disease that includes inflammation of the airways, obstruction of airflow, and increased sensitivity of the airways.

*An asthma episode is when you have difficulty breathing as a result of this disease.*

### What is an asthma “trigger:”

- **Environmental:** Triggers may include pollens, dust, animal dander, smoke, or pollution to name a few. When the airways are more sensitive, you are more likely to have asthma symptoms when exposed to the triggers that make your asthma worse.
- **Exercise induced:** Exercise can cause an asthma attack in people who have no other triggers and do not experience asthma under any other circumstances.

### How is asthma diagnosed?

Asthma can develop at any time and is diagnosed based on your symptoms, pulmonary function testing, physical examination, and chest x-ray. Ask your respiratory therapist and doctor if you have any questions about your diagnosis.

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## What are the symptoms?

Recognizing the signs and symptoms is an important part of managing asthma.

*Early warning signs* are things you feel before you have an *asthma episode*. Examples include:

- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Headache
- Throat itches
- Changes in breathing

Although signs and symptoms are unique to each person, recognizing them can help in getting treatment early and preventing an asthma episode.

Some of the symptoms of an *asthma episode* are:

- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath

## What is an Asthma Action Plan?

An Asthma Action Plan is your plan to handle an asthma episode. This plan will help you treat and recover from an asthma episode. It is based on your “peak flow numbers.”

## What is my Peak Flow number?

Peak flow numbers measure how well you are breathing. Your doctor will perform some tests on your ability to breathe. Based on the results, you will have zones that describe your ability to breathe at any given time.

- **Green Zone** = 80-100% of your personal best. You are breathing normally and have no signs or symptoms of an asthma episode.
- **Yellow Zone** = 60-80% of your personal best. You are having showing *early warning signs* of an asthma episode.
- **Red Zone** = 60% of your personal best. You are having an *asthma episode* with severe difficulty breathing.

Your healthcare provider, together with you and your family, will develop an action plan for you based on your peak flow zones, personal resources, and general health. For instance, if you are in the **Green Zone** your action plan may include taking your daily medications only. If you are in the **Red Zone**, your action plan may be to call 911 immediately. Your plan will be unique to you.

## How is asthma treated?

Your doctor will prescribe medications to help you breath easier. Bronchodilators (rescue inhaler) are usually prescribed to take during an asthma episode. Your doctor may also prescribe an anti-inflammatory medicine to take every day in order to keep your airways open which will help prevent asthma episodes.

### Prevention:

- Avoid your “triggers.”
- Pre-treat with medicine when you know you will come in contact with a trigger.
- Take your prescribed asthma medication(s) as directed.
- Monitor your peak flows regularly.
- Follow your Asthma Action Plan.
- Exercise regularly and eat a good diet.