Asthma is serious. But it doesn’t have to control your life. The first step to taking on asthma is understanding your symptoms—and what triggers them.

**COMMON SIGNS OF ASTHMA INCLUDE:**

- **A cough** especially one that’s worse at night or early in the morning
- **A whistling sound when you breathe** called wheezing
- **A feeling of tightness in your chest** like someone is squeezing or sitting on you
- **Trouble breathing** feeling like you can’t catch your breath, can’t breathe out, or are breathing more shallow or faster than usual

Symptoms can vary between people, and at different times of the day or year. Even if your symptoms are usually mild, or don’t happen all the time, they can still stop you from doing the things you want to do—and can flare up suddenly and get worse quickly. So it’s important to always take asthma seriously.

**TAKE THE NEXT STEPS IN TAKING ON ASTHMA:**

- Learn more about asthma, its triggers, symptoms, and treatment options at: [www.cdc.gov/asthma/faqs.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/faqs.htm)
- Talk to your doctor about your asthma symptoms and medications that may help
- For more information and a printable version of this brochure, visit the Vermont Department of Health’s Asthma Program online: [www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/asthma](http://www.healthvermont.gov/prevent/asthma)

Small changes at home can mean big differences in your family’s breathing.

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An asthma “trigger” is something—like an allergy or chemical—that irritates your airways and flares your symptoms. Different people have different triggers, but there are some common ones. And there are small changes you can make to avoid them—and make a big difference in your family’s breathing.

### Tackle Your Asthma Triggers

**What triggers your asthma?**
- Tobacco smoke, from smoking or being around others who smoke
- Mold, which can grow in homes with too much moisture
- Pets—some people are allergic to the dander, urine, or saliva of dogs, cats, or other pets
- Gas appliances, like stoves, washers, and dryers
- Pests and pesticides—some people are allergic to the droppings of mice, rats, or cockroaches or the pesticides used to kill them
- Common allergens, like pollen from trees, grass, and weeds, as well as food
- Colds and flu—asthma often flares when you’re sick
- Dust mites, tiny bugs you can’t see that can live in cloth, carpet, and bedding
- Strong odors and fumes, like wood smoke, paint, strong cleaning products, or perfumes

**How will you tackle it?**
- Visit 802quits.org to get help to quit smoking
- Make the house and car no-smoking zones
- Use a fan or open a window when showering
- Install a dehumidifier
- Fix—or ask the landlord to fix—water leaks
- Clean up any spills or leaks right away
- Keep pets out of bedrooms and off of furniture
- Give the dog a weekly bath
- Vacuum once or twice a week
- Use a fan or open a window when cooking
- Make sure gas appliances are vented to the outside of the house or apartment
- Put food away quickly
- Keep garbage covered and take it out regularly
- Clean up crumbs and spills right away
- Put out non-chemical cockroach and mouse traps
- Stay inside and use an air conditioner when pollen or humidity is high
- Avoid coming into contact with foods you’re allergic to
- Get a flu shot each fall
- Wash hands often with soap
- Vacuum once or twice a week
- Keep clutter out of bedrooms
- Wash bedding in hot water weekly
- Use “dust covers” on pillows and mattresses
- Switch to fragrance-free cleaning and self-care products (like shampoos)
- Avoid perfumes and perfumed sprays
- Follow clean burning practices for wood stoves and research stove change-out programs if your stove is not EPA certified