

Focus on Health

A publication on lung health from BlueHealth Advantage

FALL 2011

quit with america!

The 2011 Great American Smokeout happens on November 18! It's the perfect reason to quit tobacco for good. Visit quitnow.ne.gov for details on a **free text-messaging service and online program** provided by the Nebraska Tobacco Quitline that can help you stay smoke-free.



Ready to Say Good-Bye to Cigarettes?

When you have asthma, cigarette smoke can irritate airways that are already inflamed, causing more frequent asthma attacks. Smoking can also worsen asthma symptoms, such as coughing and wheezing. In addition, like all smokers, those with asthma are at increased risk for several diseases, including heart disease and lung cancer.

Within a few years of quitting, many serious health risks of smoking decrease dramatically. Other benefits occur right away. You'll have more energy. You'll look and smell better. And you'll have more money in your pocket.

If that sounds good to you, call your doctor to talk about a quit plan. Ask whether nicotine replacement or other quit-smoking medicines might be right for you. Such medicines help ease withdrawal symptoms—such as trouble concentrating, restlessness, tiredness, headaches, depression and irritability—which are temporary but unpleasant.

Another great resource is 800-QUIT-NOW (784-8669). When you call, you'll speak with a trained smoking-cessation counselor who can give you ideas for coping with triggers—times and places that have become linked to smoking for you. For example, you may have always smoked with a cup of coffee or while driving. The counselor can teach you ways to handle these situations without lighting up.

After you quit, you'll probably be tempted to smoke again. To get through rough patches, remind yourself of the benefits that mean the most to you. Also, plan ahead for ways to manage cravings. For instance, you might munch on celery sticks, do some deep knee bends or call a friend while you wait for the urge to pass.

Many adult smokers have already become nonsmokers. With a little help and a lot of determination, you can do it, too.

Practice Belly Breathing

Controlling your breath through special exercises is a great way to combat breathlessness, a common symptom of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Belly breathing strengthens the muscles you use when you breathe. Stronger muscles are more efficient, so breathing takes less effort.

Here's how to start:

1. Lie on your back with pillows under your head and knees, or sit comfortably in a chair.
2. Place one hand on your stomach, the other on your chest. Breathe in through the nose and allow the area around your waist to fill with air. Expand your belly. The hand on your chest should remain still, while the one on your stomach rises when you inhale.
3. As you breathe out slowly, without force or effort, use your hand to gently push inward and upward on your stomach.

Once you're comfortable breathing this way, practice belly breathing lying down with a 1-pound bag of beans or rice on your stomach. This will make the muscles even stronger. Use belly breathing while lying down, sitting, standing or walking.

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Free COPD Course

In this 45-minute class, you'll learn simple strategies to help reduce your symptoms and keep your COPD in control. For upcoming dates and times, call BlueHealth Advantage at **877-348-4329**.



A Closer Look at Quick-Relief Medications

A quick-relief medication does just what its name says: It acts fast to relieve asthma symptoms when a flare-up occurs. It helps you feel better and breathe easier right away, and it may stop an asthma attack in its tracks. A quick-relief medication is a key part of your asthma action plan.

Fast Facts on Quick Relief

Quick-relief medications—also called “rescue” medicines—are usually taken with an inhaler. They fall into a category of medications known as short-acting bronchodilators. They relax tight muscles around your airways to let the airways open wider and allow more air to get through.

Taking Your Medicine

You should have a quick-relief medication with you at all times. Kids should have access to their quick-relief inhalers at school or day care, and staff should know when and how to use them.

Use your quick-relief medication at the first sign of problems, such as coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or any asthma symptoms that wake you up at night. Also use it when your peak-flow number shows that your breathing is getting worse, even if you haven't noticed any other symptoms yet.

Most of the time, your quick-relief medication will do a great job. But if it ever

doesn't work as expected, get medical help immediately. Also, if you have to use your quick-relief inhaler more than two days a week, talk with your doctor. You might need a change in your asthma action plan.

Maximizing the Benefit

While quick-relief medication is important, it's not the whole story. It makes you feel better for a short while. But it doesn't solve the underlying problem that leads to new symptoms.

That's why most people with asthma also need a long-term control medication. This type of medicine is taken daily, even when you're feeling fine. By combining a medication for quick relief with one for long-term control, you have two powerful tools to keep asthma in check.

another possible use

If exercise sets off your asthma, your doctor may suggest using a quick-relief inhaler before physical activity. The medication can keep asthma symptoms from ever starting. To learn more, attend **Exercise and Asthma, a free class** offered throughout the year. For upcoming dates and times, call **877-348-4329**.

Keep Colds from Complicating Your Asthma

Colds and other respiratory infections may trigger your asthma symptoms. They also increase your risk of having asthma attacks, going to the hospital or getting pneumonia or bronchitis.

So what can you do when you don't feel well?

Seek Relief with Self-Care Strategies

When you're struck with the latest bug, take these steps:

- Get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and smoking or being near smokers.
- Gargle with warm salt water if you have a sore or scratchy throat.
- Soothe a raw or irritated nose with petroleum jelly.
- Heat up some soup. The heat, fluid and salt in chicken soup may help you fight infection.

Some people attempt to cure colds with therapies such as echinacea and vitamin C, but evidence supporting their use is limited. For safety's sake, check with your doctor before you try any herb or supplement.

Take Precautions Before Taking Medication

Many common over-the-counter cold remedies contain pain relief medications that worsen asthma. These include aspirin, ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Check labels and steer clear of these products unless your doctor tells you otherwise.

Also, check with your doctor before taking decongestants. They can interfere with your asthma treatment. Keep in mind that antibiotics don't help most colds, which are caused by viruses. Don't demand them if your doctor doesn't think they'll help. Be sure to use your daily asthma medication as prescribed.

Don't Let Symptoms Spin Out of Control

Keep a close watch over your asthma symptoms while you're under the weather. If your breathing problems wake you up at night or limit your regular activities, follow the steps in your asthma action plan or talk with your doctor. He or she can tell you how to adjust your existing medications to control symptoms.

If your symptoms get worse, call your doctor promptly.

shoo the flu, too!

Nearly everyone older than 6 months needs a flu shot, but it is especially important when you have a condition such as asthma or COPD. Be sure to get yours at your doctor's office or a flu shot clinic. For the latest flu news, visit livewellnebraska.com. Click on the "Flu & Colds" tab under "Health & Medicine."



Simply Sweet Potato Chips

Sweet potatoes are loaded with antioxidants, making them nutritional powerhouses. (See our other four seasonal picks on the back of this issue!)

Ingredients

- 1 5-inch sweet potato
- olive oil spray
- 1/4 tsp. no-salt herb blend

Directions

1. Peel and cut sweet potato in half diagonally. Use a mandoline or other slicer to cut into 1/8-inch slices. Put slices into a bowl of ice water for about 15 minutes to wash off some starch. Pat dry with paper towels.
2. Heat oven to 425 degrees. Line a cookie sheet with easy-release aluminum foil. Spray generously with olive oil and put the sweet potato slices in one layer.
3. Bake about eight minutes and then carefully turn over. Bake another six minutes. Let cool on a baking rack and sprinkle with no-salt herb blend. Serve at room temperature.

Serves two; each serving provides: Calories 96, Fat 5 g (Saturated fat <1 g, Trans fat 0 g, Cholesterol 0 mg), Sodium 36 mg, Fiber 2 g, Protein 1 g.



1919 Aksarben Drive, P.O. Box 3248
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How to Reach Us

When it comes to managing your health, you're never alone. BlueHealth Advantage is your partner on the path to wellness. Program us into your cellphone, PDA or email contacts, and you can call or write whenever you have questions or need support:

Call: 877-348-4329

Fax: 800-255-2838

Email: wellness@bcbsne.com

Write: 1919 Aksarben Drive, P.O. Box 3248,
Omaha, NE 68180-0001

take a look inside!

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5 Must-Have Superfoods of Fall

Fresh produce tastes best in season. Welcome autumn's bounty with these five nutritional superstars.

Greens such as collards and kale grow in summer and fall, but colder weather makes them tastier. They're high in vitamins A and C and many other nutrients. Simmer, steam or sauté chopped greens, or add them to soups and stews.

Sweet potatoes, harvested in fall, are one of the most nutritious vegetables around. Store them at room temperature for use within a week, or up to a month in a cool, dry place between 55 and 60 degrees.

Pomegranates debut in September and bow out by the end of December. The tart, jewel-like seeds contain lycopene and other heart-healthy antioxidants. To get the

seeds, cut the top off your pomegranate, score the outside lengthwise and place it in a bowl of water. Separate the scored sections, remove the seeds under water and strain. Eat the seeds fresh, press them for juice or store them in your freezer for up to three months.

Brussels sprouts are available all year, but peak in flavor during fall and winter. Trim the stems and carve a shallow X in the base of each sprout to ensure even cooking, then steam, boil or microwave them. Brussels sprouts are low in calories and high in vitamin C.

Cranberry beans are available fresh in the pod every fall. These speckled beans have a creamy texture that resembles chestnuts. They're packed with protein and are also high in calcium and potassium.

