Is Asthma Worth the Weight?
Research has shown that if you are overweight or obese, you may be at a higher risk of developing asthma. The good news is, BlueChoice® offers a weight management program.

Great Expectations® Weight Management is a 10-week program that works with you to develop strategies that maximize weight loss. The program helps you maintain a healthy weight through healthy eating and exercise. When you enroll in the program, you will have unlimited phone access to a personal weight loss coach. You’ll also get a comprehensive educational kit that includes healthy menus and recipes, a tracking log, a resistance exercise band, and relaxation exercises on CD. There is a $15 fee for the program. If you are currently participating in a Great Expectations condition management program, the fee is only $5.

Know Your Type
The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI) outlines five classifications of asthma:

- **Allergic Asthma** - symptoms are stimulated primarily by allergens like pollen, dust mites and pet dander, among many others.
- **Non-Allergic Asthma** - set off by infections, irritants, certain medications, or related conditions like gastroesophageal reflux (GERD).
- **Exercise-Induced Asthma** - symptoms occur during or after vigorous physical exercise.
- **Occupational Asthma** - related to inhaling irritants or harmful substances at work.
- **Nocturnal Asthma** - can be caused by allergens commonly found in bedrooms (like dust mites), allergen or irritant exposures that happened earlier in the day; cyclical hormonal changes that occur during sleep cycles; or GERD.

Most people with asthma fall into more than one category, but that’s not the end of the clue trail. Asthma symptoms can also be caused by irritants such as perfumes, odors from cleaning products, cold air, even laughter or emotional upset. You aren’t allergic to these things, but an allergy to something else may cause low levels of inflammation in your airways that causes symptoms.
COPD: Smokers, Nonsmokers Can Be at Risk

Your doctor just told you that you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) but you’ve never smoked a cigarette in your life. Are you wondering how this can be? Isn’t COPD a disease of smokers and former smokers?

While it’s true that 80–90 percent of COPD diagnoses in the United States result from smoking, a small percentage of people develop the condition due to other risk factors. Here’s a look at some of those risk factors:

- **Occupational or environmental hazards.** Long-term exposure to certain types of dusts, fibers and chemical fumes can result in the airway obstruction associated with COPD. Long-term exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke can be another contributing factor.
- **Air pollution.** People who live in areas with poor air quality seem to have a higher risk for COPD. This includes outdoor air pollution as well as indoor air pollution from sources such as wood- or gas-burning furnaces.
- **Genetics.** If you have a family history of COPD, you are more likely to develop the condition.
- **GERD.** Gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, causes a backflow of stomach acid and other stomach contents into the esophagus. It can worsen COPD or may even cause it.
- **Other factors.** Race, gender, or even chronic lung infections during childhood may increase your risk for developing COPD.

COPD is a chronic, progressive respiratory disease. There is no cure and it will get worse over time, especially for those who continue to smoke. But you can slow the progression of the disease by making healthy lifestyle changes. If you smoke, the first step in your treatment plan is to quit smoking. If you are a nonsmoker, your treatment plan will focus on making healthy lifestyle changes, such as getting more sleep, exercising more, avoiding risk factors and eating a healthy diet. Your doctor may prescribe medication to help slow the disease.

People at risk for COPD should talk to their doctors about getting a simple breathing test called a spirometry test. This test is especially important if you are over age 45 and have a history of smoking or are experiencing shortness of breath. During the test, you will be asked to take a deep breath in, then breathe out as hard and as fast as you can into a tube. The test will let your doctor see how well your lungs are working and whether you have COPD.

If you smoke and are interested in quitting, BlueChoice offers a Quit Smoking program that is tailored to you. When you enroll in the program, you will have unlimited telephone access to a quit coach and a comprehensive educational kit. There is a $15 fee for the program. The fee is only $5 for members participating in another Great Expectations® disease or condition management program.

Triggers: Gain Control

You can keep your child’s asthma under control by getting rid of the triggers that make it worse. When you remove triggers from your home, or keep your child away from them, you help your child stay healthy and have fewer asthma attacks.

Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂)

NO₂ is an odorless gas that can irritate the eyes, nose and throat and cause shortness of breath. Exposure to low levels of NO₂ may make young children more susceptible to respiratory infections. Long-term exposure to high levels of NO₂ can lead to chronic bronchitis.

Take action:
- If possible, use fuel-burning appliances that are vented to the outside. Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions on how to use these appliances.
- Use an exhaust fan in the kitchen when you cook with gas. Never use the stove to keep you warm or heat your house.

Molds

Molds are microscopic fungi that live on plants and animal matter. Molds can be found almost anywhere when moisture is present. For people sensitive to molds, inhaling mold spores can trigger an asthma attack.

Take Action:
- If you see mold on hard surfaces, clean it up with soap and water. Let the area dry completely.
- Use exhaust fans or open a window when showering, cooking or washing dishes.

Dust Mites

Dust mites are tiny bugs that are too small to see. They feed on human skin flakes and are found in mattresses, pillows, carpets, drapes and other fabric-covered items.

Take Action:
- Wash bedding in hot water once a week (at least 140°) and dry completely.
- Use dustproof covers on pillows and mattresses.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture every week.
- Choose stuffed toys that you can wash. Wash stuffed toys in hot water. Dry completely before your child plays with the toy. Stuffed toys that you can’t wash can be placed in the freezer in a plastic bag for 24 hours to kill dust mites.
- Dust often with a damp cloth.

Outdoor Air Pollution

Outdoor air pollution is caused by small particles and ground level ozone that comes from things like car exhaust, smoke, road dust and factory emissions.

When inhaled, outdoor pollutants and pollen can aggravate the lungs and trigger your asthma.

Actions you can take:
- Monitor the Air Quality Index.
- Stay inside with the windows closed on high-pollen days and when pollutants are high. Keep car windows closed when driving.
- Pay attention to asthma warning signs. If you start to see signs, limit outdoor activity.

Tips for Parents of Children With Asthma

Learn your child’s warning signs and catch an attack before it gets worse. Warning signs can differ from child to child. Read how one parent learned to look for warning signs:

“When Jamie starts to cough at night, I know we’re headed for trouble.”

— Carlos, dad of 7-year-old Jamie

Source: Environmental Protection Agency, http://www.epa.gov/asthma/pdfs/ll_asthma_brochure.pdf