

Need relief from asthma? Communicating with your allergist is key

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Can't find relief from your asthma symptoms? The way you communicate with your allergist can be the root of your problems. According to two papers published in the January issue of *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*, in order for treatment to be effective, asthma sufferers need to ask questions and feel as if they have open communication with their allergist.

"When patients do not understand their condition or treatment plan, they may not follow life-saving guidelines, putting them at increased risk for [asthma](#) attacks," said allergist Stanley Fineman, MD, past-president of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) and article author. "Changes need to be made by allergists and patients to ensure a treatment plan is in place that will be followed. Proper treatment and adherence to the plan not only improves quality of life, but may save lives."

In his paper, Dr. Fineman noted that only eight to 13 percent of [asthma sufferers](#) continue to refill inhaled corticosteroid prescriptions after one year. Taken early and as directed, these inhalers can improve [asthma control](#), normalize lung function and even prevent irreversible injury to airways.

Asthma is responsible for 4,000 deaths annually, according to ACAAI. The number of Americans with asthma grows every year, and currently affects 26 million Americans. The greatest rise in asthma rates is among African American children, which doubled from 2001 to 2009.

A second paper found young African American adults are particularly at risk for not following treatment plans due to communication barriers and age. They also reported feeling uncomfortable taking their medication in public settings.

"Our research found many African American asthma sufferers believed they had a better understanding of their asthma triggers and treatment as they reached young adulthood," said allergist Alan Baptist, MD, MPH ACAAI member and senior study author. "However, many do not manage their condition as advised, which can lead to increased [asthma attacks](#) and emergency room visits. Allergists need to communicate the importance of continuing medication, and patients should express any concerns they might have, such as taking medication in public, since there are often solutions. Additionally, providing adequate education and addressing specific barriers that young African American adults have in asthma management may decrease health care disparities and improve outcomes."

In this small study of 34 young adults, many of these asthma sufferers said they stopped using prescribed medication when symptoms subsided, which is a common problem among asthma sufferers nationwide.

Although symptoms can become better with time, asthma is a chronic illness. Unless directed by a physician, [asthma patients](#) should never change or discontinue preventive medications, and should always keep an adequate supply available.

"Asthma is a serious disease and discontinuing [treatment](#) can be dangerous," said Dr. Fineman. "Sufferers need to be sure they regularly take medication and that all of their concerns are being addressed."

Provided by American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

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