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QUESTION

## *WHAT IS AN ASTHMA ACTION PLAN AND HOW CAN ONE BE INDIVIDUALIZED FOR MY PATIENTS?*

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An asthma action plan is a critical component of safe and high-quality asthma management. It represents a confluence of several important principles of guideline-based asthma care: clinical monitoring, medical management, and patient education. Every patient being seen for asthma should be given a written asthma action plan, but, unfortunately, studies have shown that many patients are not. The asthma action plan provides clear guidance to a patient or family about what should be done and when and for which level of symptoms or peak expiratory flow rates, and it provides the information to let them know who should be called for assistance and when it is time to call. In short, the asthma action plan is the written roadmap that guides a patient and family in the direction of safe and effective asthma self-management (Table 23-1). It is well worth the time in the office to craft one in writing for each asthma patient.

Written asthma action plans have been shown to be more effective than oral action plans, and this fact stresses the importance of putting onto paper or into an electronic medical record what it is that the patient needs to do to manage his or her own or his or her child's asthma. Written action plans allow for the earlier detection of asthma symptoms and flares and thereby allow for earlier intervention. This timely and appropriate intervention translates into reductions in unscheduled visits to the office and emergency department and more importantly into decreased frequencies of hospitalization and death. Other important outcomes that have been enhanced through the use of written asthma action plans include the reduction in night-time asthma symptoms and in days missed from work or school. It is implied that the asthma action plan is combined with education regarding its use and that understanding of the action plan is confirmed with the patient at the time of its inception. This dual process of education and formulation of an asthma action plan is a critical combination to promote self- or family-directed asthma management that is safe and efficacious.