

USA WEEKEND

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**ThinkSmart: You can
do triathlons**

**Baseball's
lost treasures**

**Return of TV's
Brady Bunch mom**

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MAGAZINE
FOR A

SPECIAL HEALTH REPORT:

Your child & sleep

28 expert tips
for smart routines —
and important safety
steps — so *everyone*
can rest easier.

Health Briefs

BY SUSAN T. LENNON

■ **ASTHMA:** Plan for attacks

About 20 million Americans have asthma, and 5,000 die from it each year. The good news: You can learn to control the disease, says Christopher H. Fanta, M.D., co-author of *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Taking Control of Asthma*.

The basic lessons are to take preventive medicines, have a written plan, and:



AVOID YOUR TRIGGERS. Common triggers are allergens (dust, mold, pet dander), cigarette smoke, colds, some medications (beta blockers) and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).

ASSESS SEVERITY. Use a "peak flow meter" to measure lung function (an attack's severity, improvements, etc.).

USE A QUICK RELIEVER. Two to four puffs from a bronchodilator will relax muscles around the bronchial tubes.

SUPPRESS INFLAMMATION. Inhaled steroids, which reduce mucus and swelling in the walls of the bronchial tubes, may be sufficient for a mild attack; if severe, take a steroid pill.

KNOW WHEN TO CALL FOR HELP. "If these steps aren't working," Fanta says, "get immediate help."

■ **COPD:** Are you winded?

Shortness of breath is the hallmark of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), an umbrella term for chronic bronchitis, emphysema and asthmatic bronchitis. About 32 million Americans have COPD, but half don't know it yet, says Neil Schachter, M.D., author of *Life and Breath*.

If keeping up with people your own age is increasingly difficult, if you're winded by activities that used to be a breeze, or if you take longer to get over a cough or cold and feel poorly even after it's over, then ask your doctor for a "spirometry" test. You simply blow into a diagnostic machine. COPD's primary cause: cigarette smoking. **W**