
ASTHMA

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease. Symptoms may be mild and rare or frequent and life threatening. When we breathe, air passes through the nose and mouth, down the windpipe and into the lungs. When an asthmatic person is exposed to certain stimuli or triggers, these triggers will cause the muscles around the air passages to tighten: air passage walls become swollen, leading to excessive production of mucus. This further clogs the already narrowed airways, thus making breathing more difficult.

WHO GETS ASTHMA?

Asthma can affect anyone at any age. It tends to run in the family. If you have close relatives with asthma, you are more likely to have it.

MAJOR WARNING SIGNS OF AN ASTHMA ATTACK:

- wheezing or whistling sound
- shortness of breath
- chest tightness
- persistent cough
- excessive mucus production

WHAT TRIGGERS AN ASTHMA ATTACK?

Not everyone responds to the same triggers. Your allergy test results and experiences will help you identify what triggers your asthma attack. The most common asthma triggers are:

- dust
- mold spores (mildews)
- pollen from flowers, trees or grass
- air pollution
- tobacco smoke
- foods — fish, egg, nuts, peanut butter, milk products, chocolate, citrus fruits (orange, grapefruit, tangerine)
- sulfite — a preservative added to some wine, beer, dried fruits and restaurant prepared fruits and vegetables
- household pets — dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, hamsters
- household products — feathered pillows, down comforters, sprays, perfumes, scented cosmetics, vapors from cleaning solvents, paint, bleach
- certain vigorous exercises
- emotional stress and excitement
- weather changes, especially cold
- colds, flu and respiratory infection
- aspirin
- nighttime asthma

HOW TO CONTROL ASTHMA TRIGGERS

- use damp cloth to dust your home frequently
- wet mop floors instead of sweeping

- change furnace filters frequently
- avoid dust collecting items such as rugs, draperies, cloth upholstered furniture, artificial plants, stuffed animal toys
- vacuum often (an asthmatic person should be out of the room while vacuuming is being done)
- reduce molds by removing household plants and scrubbing shower and bathtub regularly
- stay indoors during midday and afternoon when pollen count is high or on days with high pollution levels
- quit smoking and avoid smoke from tobacco
- avoid foods that trigger your asthma
- keep pets out of the house
- avoid using household products that trigger your asthma
- prevent exercise induced asthma attack by following your doctor's instruction in taking medication before exercise (swimming is an excellent exercise for most people with asthma)
- learn to breathe slowly and deeply during periods of emotional excitement
- avoid close contact with people who have colds and flu and ask your doctor for flu and pneumonia vaccinations
- prevent nighttime asthma by following your doctor's instruction in taking medication before bedtime

MANAGEMENT OF ASTHMA

1. Identify and control asthma triggers
2. Use asthma medications properly
Asthma medications may be taken by mouth, injection or inhalation. They help to relax and open airways and reduce inflammation. Always take your medications at scheduled times to reduce asthma attacks. If you are using an inhaler, learn to use it correctly. Keep your inhaler with you at all times and test the quantity of medications in it regularly.
3. Monitor your asthma by using the peak flow meter regularly. The reading reveals how well your lungs are working. Keeping a daily record of your measurements can help you and your doctor better manage your asthma. A low peak flow value indicates that you should take steps to prevent an asthma attack.

If your symptoms are not controlled with medication, seek medical attention promptly.

For more information about Asthma, ask your doctor or contact: American Lung Association at 1-800-586-4872 or www.lungusa.org

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