

Understanding Asthma

1. What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic (long-term) disease that inflames and narrows the airways of the lungs. Airways that are swollen, irritated, and tight result in less air flowing to the lungs, leading to breathing problems. Asthma affects people of all ages, but it most often starts in childhood.

2. What are the signs and symptoms of asthma?

Asthma signs can be different for each person and can include:

- Wheezing (sounds when inhaling AND exhaling)
- Tickle in the throat
- Shortness of breath
- Fast breathing
- Watery eyes
- Chest tightness or chest pain
- Severe coughing at night

Asthma attacks can be mild, moderate, or severe. Mild or moderate attacks may cause wheezing and chest pain, and can be treated with asthma medications. Severe attacks may cause trouble breathing and difficulty walking or talking. Call 9-1-1 or go to the emergency room if you experience any of these severe symptoms.

3. How do you manage asthma?

Asthma can't be cured, but it can be managed. The following are steps you can take to control your asthma and prevent asthma attacks:

- Learn what causes or worsens your asthma, and take steps to avoid these triggers. Use medicines to prevent allergies and asthma attacks, if recommended by your doctor.
- Know your asthma warning signs and symptoms.
- Talk to your doctor and work on an asthma action plan together. An asthma action plan may include your warning signs, asthma triggers, asthma medicines and how to use them, and what to do if your asthma attack gets worse.
- Get vaccines that prevent respiratory infections that cause life-threatening asthma attacks. You should get an influenza vaccine every year. Talk to your doctor to make sure that you are vaccinated against pneumonia and pertussis (whooping cough).



Asthma Triggers

The following may cause asthma attacks:

- Animal droppings
- Pet dander
- Household cleansers
- Mold or mildew
- Pollen from plants
- Smoking or secondhand smoke
- Smog or air pollution
- Cockroaches
- Dust and dust mites

Important Tips

- Treat asthma symptoms right away to prevent them from getting worse.
- Always keep your asthma medication handy, and know how to use them.
- Don't use someone else's asthma medicine.
- Make sure you have received all vaccines that can prevent respiratory infections.

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