

Asthma is a disease of the respiratory system. It is due to inflammation of the lining of the small airways in the lungs. Inflammation is the body's way of reacting to injury and /or infection. In someone with asthma, the body is overly reactive to things that can bring on an asthma attack.

Asthma is a common illness of childhood. Knowing more about your child's illness can help you handle it better. It cannot be cured, but medicine can help control it. Some children do outgrow asthma.

What causes asthma?

The exact cause of asthma is not known. It may be due to a combination of factors such as:

- Family history of asthma or allergies
- Certain infections in childhood.
- Exposure to airborne allergens early in childhood.

What are the symptoms of asthma?

- Wheezing and coughing
- Frequent or severe coughing with a simple cold is often a sign of asthma.
- Chest tightness and shortness of breath.

Symptoms may be constant or intermittent. Symptoms are often worse at night and first thing in the morning.

What causes an asthma attack?

There are many things that can cause an asthma attack. Some of the most common are:

- Allergies—(to things like animal dander from cats, dogs, hamsters etc...pollen, dust mites, cockroaches, food and molds)
- Infection (usually viral)
- Exercise can trigger an attack in children with asthma. Proper pre-exercise medicines allow most children to participate in sports.
- Irritants (pollution, cigarette smoke, strong odors, aerosol sprays, paint fumes, etc.). Children should not breathe second hand smoke. Children should avoid any exposure to cigarette smoke.
- Weather changes. There is not one best climate for children with asthma. Winds increase molds and pollens in the air. Rain refreshes the air by washing irritants out.
- Cold air
- Stress and emotional upset

How do I keep from having an attack?

It is important to remain calm during an asthmatic attack. The anxiety produced during a child's asthmatic attack is best handled with calm reassurance. If any child with asthma seems to be getting worse and is not getting better with treatment, seek immediate medical care.

Control you home environment in the following ways:

- Change your heating/air conditioning filter at least once a month
- Limit your use of fire places and wood stoves

- If you must smoke, smoke outside and away from the child. Change your clothes after smoking. Do not smoke in a car.
- Get rid of cockroaches and their droppings.
- If you see mold on a plant, throw it away.
- Clean your floors and dust every week. Use unscented cleaning products. Vacuum when the child is not home. Use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter if possible.
- If you are remodeling, change your floors to wood or vinyl.
- Use allergy –proof pillows, mattress covers, and box spring covers.
- Wash bed sheets and blankets every week in hot water and dry in a dryer.
- Use a blanket that is made of polyester or cotton with a tight nap.
- Limit stuffed animals to one or two and wash them monthly with hot water and dry in a dryer.
- Clean bathrooms and kitchens with bleach and repaint with mold resistant paint. Keep child with asthma out of the room while cleaning.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Talk to physician/pediatrician about an asthma action plan. Be sure your child’s school or daycare has a copy of the action plan and your child’s rescue medicine on hand.
- Be sure your child and family get annual flu shots.
- Refill your medicines before they run out.
- Always give your child their medicine like the doctor tells you.
- Stop smoking.

Additional Notes

Seek medical care if:

- There is wheezing and shortness of breath even if medicines are given to prevent attacks.
- There are muscle aches, chest pain, or thickening of sputum.
- Wheezing or tight cough lasts more than 1 day despite treatment.
- Frequent wheeze or tight cough.
- Waking at night from cough or wheeze.
- Your child is avoiding activities or sports due to asthma.
- Your child is using rescue inhalers more often.
- Peak flow (if used) is in the red zone (less than 50% of personal best).

Seek immediate medical attention if:

- The nostrils flare.
- The spaces between or under the ribs suck in.
- Your child develops severe chest pain.
- Your child has a rapid pulse, difficulty breathing, or cannot speak more than a few words before needing to stop to catch his/her breath.
- There is a bluish color to the lips or fingernails.
- Your child acts frightened during an attack and you are not able to calm them down.
- Your child is unusually drowsy.