

Understanding Asthma

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.

What are the signs and symptoms of asthma?

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

- Wheezing (whistling sounds when exhaling)
- Shortness of breath
- Fast breathing
- Chest tightness or chest pain
- Frequent coughing, especially 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.

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.
- Know your asthma warning signs. (Warning signs may include: fever, tickle in the throat, watery eyes, and severe coughing at night).
- 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.



Asthma Triggers

The following may cause asthma attacks:

- Animal droppings
- Pet dander
- Household cleansers
- Mold/mildew
- Pollen from plants
- Secondhand smoke
- Outdoor air pollution

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.

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