

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic (long-lasting) illness characterized by episodes of airflow obstruction in the bronchial tubes. There is no cure for asthma, however, it can be well controlled.

- There is inflammation of the airways causing swelling and mucus production.
- Airways constrict (narrow) and breathing becomes more difficult.
- Airways are sensitive to many factors in the environment including cigarette smoke, dust, pollen, viruses and cold air.

What Are the Symptoms of Asthma?

- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Cough
- Tightness in the chest
- For some people, cough may be the only symptom of asthma. In general, asthma is worse at night or during exercise.

What Happens During an Asthma Attack?

The lining of the airways becomes inflamed (swollen).

The airways produce thick mucus.

The muscles around the airways tighten and make the airways narrower. This makes it difficult for air to get in and out of the lungs.

What Causes Asthma?

The cause of asthma is not yet fully known. We do know that a tendency toward asthma can run in families and that allergies play a role. Asthma is not caused by emotional factors, although emotions can **trigger** episodes.

What Causes (Triggers) Asthma Episodes?

Asthma patients' airways are super-sensitive to allergens or irritants that otherwise do not bother other people. Working to avoid these asthma triggers is an important part of asthma management. Common triggers include:

Dust and house dust mites

Pollens (trees, grasses, weeds)

Molds (indoor and outdoor)

Pets (cats, dogs, hamsters, birds, etc.)

Infections (colds, sinusitis)

Cigarette smoke; wood smoke; air pollution;

Strong odors (fresh paint, cleaners, hair sprays, etc.)

Exercise

Showing strong feelings (crying, laughing, emotional upset)

Changes in weather and temperature (esp. cold air)

How are Asthma Episodes Controlled?

To control asthma episodes, you need to have a treatment plan from your doctor including:

Recognizing when asthma is starting to worsen

Prompt and appropriate treatment of symptoms

Knowledge of the different types of asthma medicines

Knowing when a doctor's help is needed.

What are the Goals of Asthma Management?

Maintain an active lifestyle free from asthma symptoms (participation in sports and physical exercise)

Prevent severe asthma attacks - avoid emergency room visits and hospitalizations

Maintain the best possible lung function (measured either in the doctor's office or by peak flows)

Avoid side effects from the asthma medicines