



A health series to educate families on well-being issues with their children

A collaborative effort of Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC and The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center



UPMC

What is Asthma?

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What is Asthma?

- Asthma is a chronic disease that affects your lungs and your breathing.
- When asthma acts up, it can be called an asthma attack or an asthma exacerbation.
- When you have an asthma attack, the airways in the lungs become more inflamed and your air way muscles make the airways narrow. (diagram 1.)

What are the symptoms of asthma?

- A tight feeling in the chest, making it feel like it is difficult to breathe
- Wheezing, or noisy breathing
- Coughing, especially at night
- Having to work really hard to breathe

How often do asthma symptoms (an attack) occur?

- A person with asthma may have difficulty breathing (an asthma attack) one day but feel really good the next day.
- Asthma symptoms may occur every day, or once a week, or even less.
- Some people can go months (such as summertime) and have no symptoms.

Is asthma dangerous?

- Some days, you may have no symptoms. Other days, the symptoms may be very severe.
- But, each event is important. An asthma attack that is not treated properly can lead to emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and even death.
- When asthma is not controlled, you can miss school days or not be able to participate in sports or other fun activities.





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What is Asthma?

What causes an asthma attack?

- Asthma attacks are a flare up that are most often triggered by something that the child breathes in.
- Dog and cat hair and pet dander often trigger a lot of asthma attacks.
- Dust and mold in the house trigger asthma attacks.
- Cigarette smoke triggers asthma attacks.
- Odors, fragrances, and room deodorizers all can contribute to an asthma attack.
- Changes in hot or cold air can trigger asthma attacks.
- Some people have more asthma attacks when they are sick with a cold.

How is asthma treated?

There are two main medicines that are used to treat asthma.

- **Fast-acting RESCUE medicines** (most common name: albuterol.)
 - o This medicine is designed to RELAX the muscles around the airways.
 - o It is inhaled through an inhaler and a spacer to put the medicine in the air for you to breathe in. (diagram 2).
 - o These medicines should be taken ONLY when needed to stop an asthma attack.
 - o The doctor provides instructions. If you have an asthma attack, you can use this medicine right away. For most fast-acting medicines, you can repeat this inhaled medicine 4 hours later if you are still having symptoms.
 - o Some children will feel a fast heart beat for a while after these medicines.
- **Long-acting CONTROLLER medicines**
 - o These medicines control asthma and prevent future symptoms.
 - o These medicines are taken every day, sometimes in morning and night.
 - o The medicines should be taken every day, even if you don't have symptoms.
 - o They are given to people who have frequent asthma attacks to better prevent future attacks.
 - o These medicines are also inhaled through an inhaler.
 - o Some people take the inhaled medicine right before they brush their teeth to keep a routine and make it easy to remember.





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What is Asthma?

How is asthma treated? (cont'd)

- **Both fast acting rescue medications and long acting controller medicines are inhalers. It is very important to label each one with a sticker or marker to keep these medicines straight.** (diagram 3)

How does a person get diagnosed with asthma?

- A doctor will complete an examination and ask many questions. These include:
 - o What are the symptoms that you have?
 - o How often do you have symptoms?
 - o What do you think causes the symptoms?
 - o Do the symptoms wake you up at night?
 - o Does anything (or medicine) make the symptoms go away?

When should I see a doctor?

- A person with asthma should see their doctor for regular check-ups and medication refills.
- If you are having a mild asthma attack and the quick-acting inhaler improves your symptoms, you do not need to see the doctor.
- If you have an asthma attack and the quick-acting inhaler is not providing relief, you should see your doctor or go to the emergency room.
- If you are having an asthma attack and having a lot of difficulty getting air moving, call 911.

How can you prevent asthma attacks?

- The most important way to prevent asthma attacks is to avoid triggers.
- No one should smoke around a child with asthma or in the home where the child lives.
- Many families with a person with asthma get rid of pets.
- It is also very important to take your long-acting controller inhaler medication if the doctor prescribed one to you.
- Regular exercise is good for lungs and your whole body.



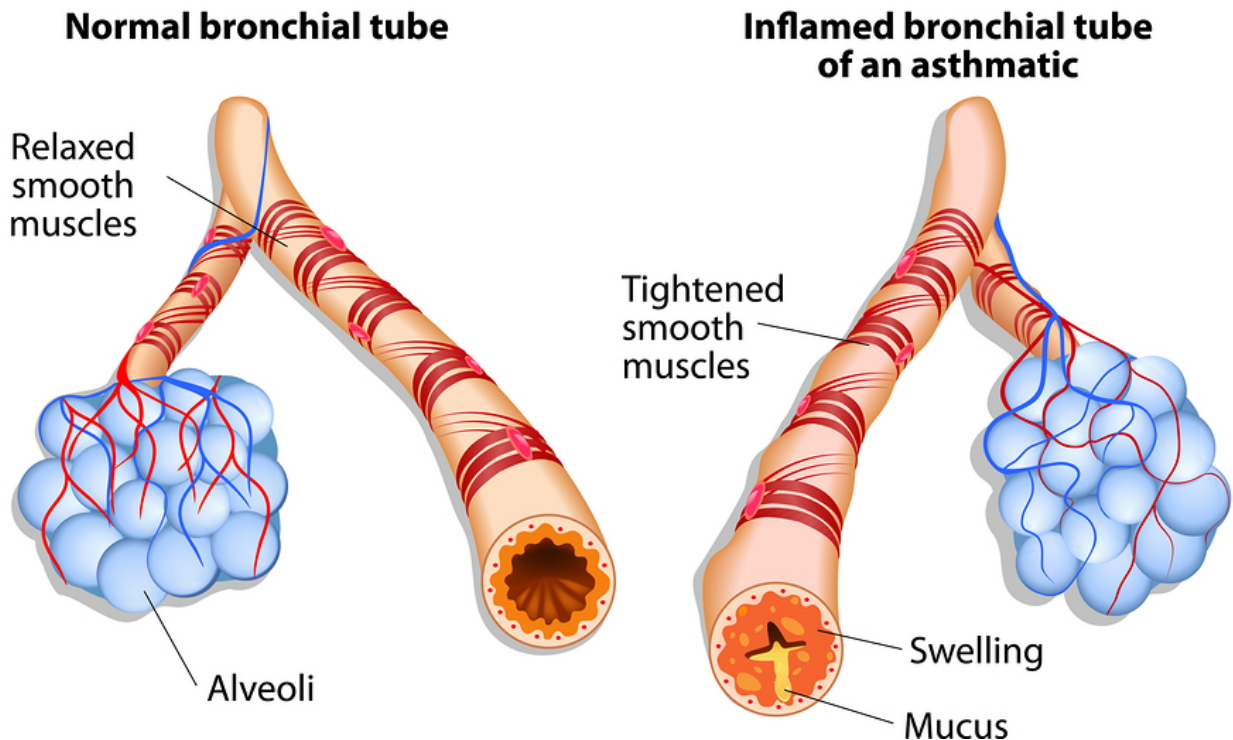
What is Asthma?

Does asthma run in families or come with anything else?

- Asthma is more common in people who have related blood family members with asthma, but anyone can have asthma.
- Many people with asthma also have allergies.
- Many people with asthma or allergies also have eczema.
- Treating these chronic conditions can help control your asthma.

Diagram 1:

BRONCHOCONSTRICTION (ASTHMA)





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What is Asthma?

Diagram 2:



Diagram 3:



Content Sources:

American Academy of Pediatrics /Healthy Children: www.healthychildren.org

American Lung Association: www.lung.org

Kids Health: www.kidshealth.org

Up To Date: www.uptodate.com

