

Learn about asthma and how you can manage it.

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a disease that affects your lungs. It causes wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing at night or early in the morning. If you have asthma, it can get better for a while and then worse. That's because you have it all the time.

What Causes Asthma?

It is unknown what causes asthma. Sometimes it is caused by a specific trigger such as inhaling certain things in the air, like pollen. If someone in your family has asthma, then you are more likely to have it too.

People of all races, ages, and genders may be affected by asthma. People in every region of the U.S. have asthma.

However, asthma impacts everyone differently. The best thing to do is talk to your doctor. Together you can develop a plan that works for you.

How Do You Know If You Have Asthma?

Go to your doctor. Have your doctor check for allergies and how well your lungs work. Your doctor will ask you about the following:

- Do you cough a lot, especially at night?
- Are your breathing problems worse after physical activity or at certain times of the year?
- Do you have chest tightness, wheezing or colds that last more than 10 days?
- Does anyone in your family have asthma, allergies, or other breathing problems?

Your doctor may do a lung test to find out how well your lungs are working. It is called spirometry. The test will measure how much air you breathe out after taking a very deep breath before and after using asthma medicine.

What Are Asthma Attacks?

People who have asthma can have an asthma attack. An asthma attack may include coughing, chest tightness, wheezing, and trouble breathing. During an asthma attack, the sides of the airways in your lungs swell and the airways shrink. Less air gets in and out of your lungs. Mucus that your body makes clogs up the airways.

An asthma attack can happen when you are exposed to "asthma triggers." Some of the most common triggers are tobacco smoke, dust mites, outdoor air pollution, cockroach allergen, pets, mold, smoke from burning wood or grass, and infections such as flu.



How Do I Control Asthma?

Schedule your annual well care visit. Talk to your doctor about how often you need doctor's visits.

- Your doctor may prescribe medicine. Take it exactly how your doctor tells you, even if you do not have symptoms.
- Stay away from things that can trigger an attack.
- Make your own asthma action plan. Write down how you will manage your asthma both routinely and during an attack.

Source: National Center for Environmental Health