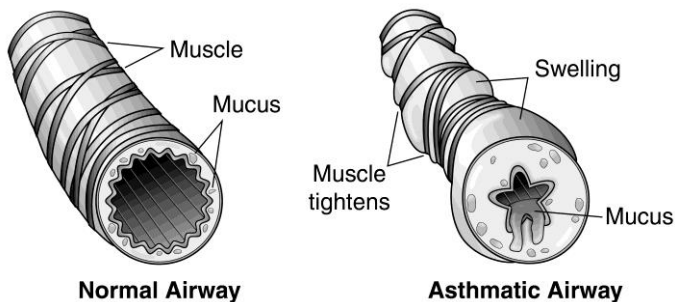


Asthma

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that results in changes in the airway.

- Muscles become tight around the airways
- Airway walls thicken
- Thick mucus is produced in the airway
- Airways become “twitchy” or are quick to react to triggers



What are the symptoms of asthma?

Symptoms of asthma vary from person to person. They can worsen when exposed to asthma triggers. These symptoms may include:

- Coughing, which often occurs at night, with exercise, or in the cold.
- Wheezing, a whistling sound when breathing.
- Shortness of breath or the feeling of breathing through a straw.
- Chest tightness.

What causes or triggers symptoms of asthma?

People with asthma have sensitive airways that react to “triggers.” Although we do not know the exact cause of asthma, some common triggers are listed below.

- Infections (such as colds or sinus infections)
- Exercise
- Allergens (such as pets, dust mites, pollens, molds, or foods)
- Cold air and/or hot, humid air
- Changes in weather
- Irritants (such as tobacco smoke, perfume, air fresheners, or pollution)
- Emotions (such as stress, laughter, or crying)
- Aspirin or aspirin-like medicines
- Heartburn/reflux

The best asthma treatment plan is to avoid triggers as much as you can! Your asthma care clinic will have more information about triggers and how to avoid them.

Being around people who are smoking can cause serious harm to your lungs. To receive help to quit smoking, please call the Wisconsin Quit Line at **1-800-784-8669**.

Can asthma symptoms be controlled?

Yes, with treatment you can exercise and sleep through the night without coughing or wheezing. It is vital to follow your asthma action plan given to you by your asthma care team.

This plan includes:

- Being aware of warning signs of asthma symptoms.
- Learning about asthma triggers and how to avoid them.
- Taking allergy and asthma medicines as prescribed to both control and relieve symptoms.
- Checking peak flows (if part of the treatment plan).
- Follow-up visits every 6 months with your asthma care clinic.
- Extra visits to your asthma clinic if symptoms worsen.

How is asthma treated?

You must take charge to both avoid and treat breathing problems. Asthma may be treated.

Medicines

Use controller medicines (such as Flovent[®], Alvescor[®], Pulmicort[®], Asmanex[®], Advair[®], Symbicort[®], Dulera[®], Singulair[®]) every day to help control airway swelling.

Rescue medicines (such as albuterol, Proventil[®], Ventolin[®], ProAir[®], Xopenex[®]) are quick relief medicines. They act within minutes to help relieve cough and wheezing by relaxing the airway muscles.

Rescue medicines may also be used before exercise and/or allergen exposure to prevent symptoms.

Relax

Anxiety can make asthma symptoms worse. Taking slow, deep breaths can help you calm down during an asthma attack.

Exercise

Regular exercise to strengthen both your heart and lungs is very important if you have asthma.

When to Call

Call your **clinic** if:

- Your asthma is not well controlled.
- Your symptoms cause problems with sleeping, exercise, school or work.
- You are using quick relief medicine (albuterol) 2 or more times a week during the day (except for exercise).
- You are waking up 2 or more times a month due to asthma symptoms.
- Your asthma symptoms are worse (coughing, wheezing, chest tightness).

Call **911** if:

- You have severe pulling in of neck or chest muscles to breathe
- Albuterol (rescue medicine) isn't helping symptoms
- You cannot speak or talk because of asthma
- Your lips or fingernails look blue

The Spanish version of this *Health Facts for You* is #5121s.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©2/2020. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5121.