



WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic disease of the airways. Asthma causes swelling, narrowing the airways and making it more difficult to breathe. Irritated cells in the airways make more mucus than usual, further narrowing the airways. While mucus normally helps shield your lungs from irritants like dust, bacteria and smoke, too much mucus can lead to trouble breathing.

Asthma is different for everyone. Its symptoms and onset vary greatly from person to person. There is currently no cure for asthma, but with proper treatment, people who have asthma can live normal, healthy lives.

During normal breathing, air flows freely in and out of the lungs.

However, during an asthma attack or episode, the following issues can make breathing more difficult:

- The airways' lining swells.
- Muscles surrounding the airways tighten.
- Thick mucus clogs the tiny airways.



NORMAL AIRWAY



ASTHMA AIRWAY

Symptoms of asthma can vary from mild to life threatening, and can be different between people.

- **Wheezing:** Whistling or squeaky sound when you breathe.
- **Coughing:** Often worse at night or early in the morning.
- **Shortness of breath:** Feeling breathless or unable to get enough air out of your lungs.
- **Chest tightness or pain:** Feeling like something is squeezing or sitting on your chest.



WHO GETS ASTHMA?

Asthma affects people of all ages and while it can start in adulthood, it most often starts during childhood. Young children who wheeze a lot and have frequent respiratory infections that continue beyond six years old are at greater risk. Genetics can also play a role in developing asthma. Having a family history of eczema, allergies, or having parents or siblings that have asthma increases risk. It's not known what causes asthma, but it is known that exposure to certain things can trigger an asthma attack.

ASTHMA SYMPTOMS

Asthma symptoms vary from person to person and can flare up anytime – day or night. Having symptoms may mean your asthma is not well controlled. See your health care provider if:

- You have symptoms or are using your quick-relief inhaler more than two times a week.
- You have symptoms that wake you up two or more times a month.
- You refill your quick-relief inhaler prescription more than two times per year.
- Your asthma is getting in the way of your usual activities like going to school or work.

Do not ignore asthma symptoms. Symptoms that are not easily relieved by using a quick-relief inhaler or that reoccur should be evaluated by your health care provider, or you should go to the emergency room or call 9-1-1.

COMMON ASTHMA TRIGGERS

- **Pollutants in the air** we breathe, pollen, wood smoke, chemicals, and scented products.
- **Dust mites** are tiny spider-like mites that live in cloth, carpet, and bedding.
- **Indoor mold**, which can develop if your home has high moisture or water leaks.
- **Dander, saliva and excrement** from furry or feathered pets like cats, dogs, and birds.
- **Pests** such as mice, rats, and cockroaches.
- **Commercial tobacco smoke** including from second-hand smoke.
- **Other** cold air, weather changes, viral infections, strong emotions, and aerobic exercise.

Many different things trigger asthma, and sensitivity to triggers varies greatly from person to person. It is important for people with asthma to talk with their health care providers to understand what triggers may cause their asthma to flare up, and learn ways to reduce exposure or eliminate triggers as much as possible.

