



Asthma Awareness

MU Patient Education Series

Asthma:

Asthma (AZ-ma) is a chronic (long-term) lung disease that swells and narrows the airways. Asthma symptoms can be mild and go away on their own or after minimal treatment with asthma medicine. Other times, symptoms continue to get worse. Asthma symptoms are different for each person. You should talk to your healthcare provider about things that make your asthma worse.

The exact cause of asthma is not known. Researchers believe asthma comes from family genes or the environment.

CAUSES:

- Development of allergies, called atopy (AT-o-pe)
- Parents who have asthma
- Certain respiratory infections during childhood
- Contact with some allergies from the air or exposure to some viral infections in infancy or in early childhood when the immune system is developing

SYMPTOMS:

- Coughing (usually worse at night or early in the morning)
- Wheezing (wheezing is a whistling or squeaky sound that happens when you breathe)
- Chest tightness (tightness may feel like something is squeezing or sitting on your chest)
- Shortness of breath (may feel it is hard to catch your breath or feel out of breath)

TRIGGERS CAN INCLUDE:

- Allergens from dust, animal fur, cockroaches, mold, pollens from trees, grasses, and flowers
- Cigarette smoke, air pollution, chemicals or dust in the workplace, compounds in home décor products, and sprays (such as hairspray)



- Medicines such as aspirin, other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, and some drugs
- Sulfites in foods and drinks
- Viruses, upper respiratory infections or colds
- Physical activity, including exercise
- Reflux disease (GERD)
- Psychological stress
- Sleep apnea
- Cold air

HOW IS ASTHMA DIAGNOSED?

- Evaluation of your medical and family histories
- Physical exam (doctor will listen to your breathing and look for signs of asthma or allergies)
- Test results, spirometer (measures how much air you can breathe in and out and how fast you can blow air out)
- Chest x-ray
- EKG
- Allergy testing
- Sputum sample to test your saliva and mucus

Your doctor will determine how bad your asthma is. Asthma can range from intermittent (comes and goes), to mild, moderate, or severe. The treatment plan will depend on the severity of your asthma.

TREATMENT OPTIONS:

Treatment involves working with your doctor to control symptoms:

- Avoid triggers
- Take medications as prescribed (usually inhalers or breathing treatments)
- Create an asthma action plan (know what medicines to take and when)

TIPS:

- Visit your doctor if you have difficulty breathing, or if you experience any of these symptoms
- If you have asthma, make a note of what is happening when symptoms get worse and inform your doctor

Asthma can be life threatening. Recognize the symptoms, seek medical assistance if unsure.

References: National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. What Is Asthma? Available at: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma/> Accessed July 31, 2013

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