

Asthma Basics

The following information provides an introduction to asthma.

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that can restrict a child's ability to breathe.

What is an Asthma Episode?

During an asthma episode or attack the airways narrow and it becomes difficult to breathe.

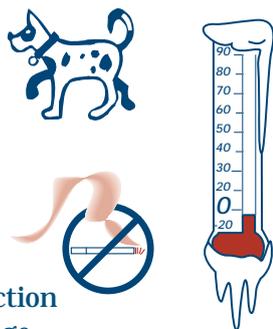
There are three factors that contribute to this occurrence:

1. the muscles around the airways tighten, narrowing the airways;
2. the airways narrow and are blocked due to swelling and inflammation; and
3. more mucus than usual is produced inside the airways, further blocking them.

What Causes an Asthma Episode?

Episodes of asthma are usually caused by some condition or stimulus commonly referred to as an asthma trigger. Triggers vary between children and the following list is not all-inclusive.

- ❖ airpollution
- ❖ tobaccosmoke
- ❖  pets
- ❖ dustmites
- ❖ aerosols,perfumes & strong odors
- ❖ cockroaches
- ❖ woodsmoke
- ❖ exercise
- ❖ viralrespiratoryinfection
- ❖ coldair/weatherchange



What are the Warning Signs and Symptoms of an Asthma Attack?

The main symptoms of an asthma attack are:

- ❖ Shortness of breath
- ❖ Wheezing
- ❖ Tightness in the chest
- ❖ Persistent cough

Warning signs are physical changes that can occur before an asthma episode becomes evident. Warning signs can be recognized hours or days before more obvious symptoms appear. Children will have different signs at different times. The most common warning signs include changes in breathing patterns:

- ❖ Coughing
- ❖ Shortness of breath
- ❖ Wheezing
- ❖ Rapid breathing
- ❖ Breathing through the mouth

Children may also experience:

- ❖ Being easily out of breath
- ❖ Achy chest
- ❖ Dark circles under eyes
- ❖ Mood changes

Some children can experience allergy symptoms, such as a stuffy nose and itchy watery eyes, prior to showing asthma symptoms.

What Types of Medication Help Treat Asthma?

There are many different forms of medications for asthma available through a doctor's prescription. The most common form is the inhaler and medications given through a nebulizer. Asthma medications are used for two main purposes:

1. To help control and prevent airway inflammation. These are also called anti-inflammatory medications. These medications prevent asthma episodes and must be taken on a daily basis.
2. To help relieve asthma symptoms by relaxing the muscles around the airways. These include the bronchodilators. These medications are used during an asthma episode to help open the airways and are taken as needed.