

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a condition in which your airways narrow and swell and produce extra mucus. This can make breathing difficult and trigger coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath.

If you have asthma, the inside walls of the airways in your lungs can become inflamed and swollen. In addition, membranes in your airway linings may secrete excess mucus. The result is an asthma attack. During an asthma attack, your narrowed airways make it harder to breathe and you may cough and wheeze.

SYMPTOMS

Asthma symptoms vary from person to person. You may have infrequent asthma attacks, have symptoms only at certain times — such as when exercising — or have symptoms all the time.

Asthma signs and symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness or pain
- Trouble sleeping caused by shortness of breath, coughing or wheezing is a sign of asthma in children)
- Coughing or wheezing attacks that are worsened by a respiratory virus, such as a cold or the flu

Signs that your asthma is probably worsening include:

- Asthma signs and symptoms that are more frequent and bothersome
- Increasing difficulty breathing (measurable with a peak flow meter, a device used to check how well your lungs are working)
- The need to use a quick-relief inhaler more often

For some people, asthma signs and symptoms flare up in certain situations:

- Exercise-induced asthma, which may be worse when the air is cold and dry
- Occupational asthma, triggered by workplace irritants such as chemical fumes, gases or dust
- Allergy-induced asthma, triggered by airborne substances, such as pollen, mould spores, cockroach waste or particles of skin and dried saliva shed by pets (pet dander)

Seek emergency treatment:

Severe asthma attacks can be life-threatening. Work with your doctor to determine what to do when your signs and symptoms worsen and when you need emergency treatment. Signs of an asthma emergency include:

- Rapid worsening of shortness of breath or wheezing
- No improvement even after using a quick-relief inhaler
- Shortness of breath when you are doing minimal physical activity

See your doctor:

- If you think you have asthma.
- If you have frequent coughing or wheezing that lasts more than a few days or any other signs or symptoms of asthma. Treating asthma early may prevent long-term lung damage and help keep the condition from worsening over time.
- To monitor your asthma after diagnosis. If you know you have asthma, work with your doctor to keep it under control. Good long-term control helps you feel better from day to day and can prevent a life-threatening asthma attack.
- If your asthma symptoms get worse or if your medication doesn't seem to ease your symptoms or if you need to use your quick-relief inhaler more often. Don't try to solve the problem by taking more medication without consulting your doctor. Overusing asthma medication can cause side effects and may make your asthma worse.

Review your treatment. Asthma often changes over time. Meet with your doctor regularly to discuss your symptoms and make any needed treatment adjustments.