

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory condition of the lungs in which the small airways (or bronchioles) are over reactive and become temporarily narrowed or blocked in response to various “triggers.” This reaction causes the following:

1. Tightening of the muscles around the airways
2. Increased mucus production
3. Inflammation and swelling of the lining of the airways

THE MAIN SYMPTOMS OF ASTHMA

Frequent cough
Shortness of breath
Wheezing
Tightness in chest
Waking at night with any of the above symptoms
Cough with exercise

Asthma symptoms can vary greatly in children, in both frequency and severity. Not all patients with asthma wheeze. For some, coughing may be the only symptom of asthma. Coughing often occurs during the night or after exercise.

Children with asthma have very sensitive airways that overreact to certain stimuli, also known as triggers. Learning what triggers asthma episodes and avoiding those triggers is very important in managing your child’s asthma. Common triggers are viral respiratory infections (colds), environmental allergies, animals, and irritants such as tobacco smoke.

TREATING ASTHMA

There are a variety of medicines available to treat asthma. What is important to know is that there is no “best” medicine for all people. Each person’s asthma is different and your doctor will work with you to set up the best plan for you, based upon your symptoms and your needs. By taking the right medicine at the right times, you can breathe better, do more of the things you want to do, and have fewer asthma symptoms.

Some asthma medicines relax your airways and help you breathe easier, while other treatments reduce the swelling and inflammation in your airways. Some medicines help prevent asthma symptoms. You need to take these medicines all the time, even when you feel well. Other medicines may be needed if your asthma starts to get worse. If your asthma is getting worse, it’s important to start treatment early, as soon as your symptoms begin. It’s important to follow your doctor’s advice about your treatment. Here are the types of medicines usually prescribed for asthma:

Bronchodilators: Albuterol / ProAir / Ventolin / Xopenex

Bronchodilators relax the muscles around the airways, making it easier to breathe. Bronchodilators work quickly after you take them so that you feel relief from symptoms quickly.

Anti-Inflammatories: Flovent / Pulmicort / Asmanex / Qvar

Anti-inflammatory medicines help by reducing the swelling and mucus production inside the airways, making it easier to breathe. These medicines are also called corticosteroids or steroids. It is important to rinse out your mouth with water immediately after using them to avoid getting a yeast infection in your throat called thrush. Note: Some corticosteroids are in pill form and usually are used for short periods of time in special circumstances, such as when your symptoms are getting worse.

Combination Medicines: Advair

There are a few medicines that combine inhaled bronchodilators and inhaled corticosteroids.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR ASTHMA MEDICINE

Asthma medicines do not cure asthma but they can help improve your symptoms. The most important thing is to take your medicine(s) exactly as your doctor has instructed you to take them. That means, taking the right medicine at the right time and with the proper technique!

ASTHMA MEDICATION DEVICES

There are several ways to take asthma medication. Your will child will most likely use an inhaler. There are three basic types of devices that deliver inhaled medication:

1. **Metered-Dose Inhaler with Spacer:** A metered-dose inhaler (MDI), also known as an aerosol inhaler, releases medication in a fine spray. A spacer (a holding tube or bag attached to the MDI) helps make sure more of the medication goes into the child's lungs. It also makes side effects less likely to occur.
2. **Dry Powder Inhaler:** This type of inhaler releases medication in tiny grains of powder. No spacer is needed. To use this inhaler, the child must be able to take a quick, deep breath.



3. **Nebulizer:** A nebulizer turns medication into a fine mist. The child breathes in this mist through a mouthpiece or mask that fits closely on the face. Nebulizers are sometimes used by infants or toddlers.

