

Asthma

A S T H M A

About 17 million Americans have asthma. Nearly five million of them are children. Many children outgrow asthma in their teen years. Each year, 5000 people die from asthma.

Asthma is a disease of the lung airways. The airways get swollen and inflamed. They react easily to certain things, like viruses, smoke, or pollen. When the inflamed airways react, they get narrow. This makes it hard to breathe.

There is no known cure for asthma. But you can control it well.

How do I know if I have asthma?

Symptoms of asthma may include:

- coughing
- wheezing
- shortness of breath
- chest tightness

When these symptoms get worse, it's an "asthma attack."

Why are some people more likely to have asthma?

- Some people are more at risk due to their family history. And you are more likely to have asthma symptoms if you live where the air quality is bad.

Many things may start or worsen an asthma attack including:

- Being exposed to allergens (dust mites, cockroaches, etc)
- Viral infections of the lungs and airways
- Tobacco smoke and certain outside pollutants (chemicals or dirt in the air)
- Exercise

At what age do people get asthma?

- Many older adults have asthma. Some people develop it later in life. Others get asthma as children. The asthma may or may not go away as they grow up.

I think I have asthma. What tests should I have done?

- Chest x-ray
- Blood test
- Tests to measure how open your airways are
- Tests that show whether or not you have heart disease

How can asthma be treated?

There are many drugs used to treat asthma. There are both prescription drugs and over-the-counter drugs. Talk with your doctor about the best medicine for you.

Asthma (cont.)

How do I keep my asthma under control?

- Talk with your doctor.
- Ask your doctor for a treatment plan. Then be sure to follow it.
- Watch for early signs and respond fast.
- Stay away from things that make your asthma worse.
- See your doctor at least every 6 months.

What to do if someone is having an asthma attack

- Know the signs of trouble:
 - The person has stopped playing or working and can't start again.
 - They're struggling to breathe.
 - They have trouble walking or talking.
- Stay calm and relaxed.
- Remove the person from whatever brought on the attack (the allergy trigger).
- Find the person's inhaler.
- Call 911 if the person is having trouble breathing or if their lips or fingernails are blue.

To Learn More...

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Information Center
Phone: 1-301-251-1222
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov>

American Lung Association
Phone: 1-800-586-4872 (1-800-LUNG USA)
<http://www.lungusa.org>

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Phone: 1-800-727-8462 (1-800-7-ASTHMA)
<http://www.aafa.org>