



Asthma, Child

Asthma is a disease of the respiratory system. It causes swelling and narrowing of the air tubes inside the lungs. When this happens there can be coughing, a whistling sound when you breathe (wheezing), chest tightness, and difficulty breathing. The narrowing comes from swelling and muscle spasms of the air tubes. Asthma is a common illness of childhood. Knowing more about your child's illness can help you handle it better. It cannot be cured, but medicines can help control it.

CAUSES

Asthma is often triggered by allergies, viral lung infections, or irritants in the air. Allergic reactions can cause your child to wheeze immediately when exposed to allergens or many hours later. Asthma attacks are started or 'triggered' by something that bothers the lungs.

Common triggers for asthma include:

- Allergies (animals, pollen, dust, feathers, food, and molds, etc.).
- Infection (usually viral). Antibiotics are not helpful for viral infections and usually do not help with asthmatic attacks.
- Exercise. Proper pre-exercise medicines allow most children to participate in sports.
- Irritants (pollution, cigarette smoke, strong odors, aerosol sprays, and paint fumes). Smoking should not be allowed in homes of children with asthma. Children should not be around smokers.
- Weather changes. There is not one best climate for children with asthma. Winds increase molds and pollens in the air, rain refreshes the air by washing irritants out, and cold air may cause inflammation.
- Stress and emotional upset. Emotional problems do not cause asthma but can trigger an attack. Anxiety, frustration, and anger may produce attacks. These emotions may also be produced by attacks.

SYMPTOMS

Wheezing and excessive nighttime or early morning coughing are common signs of asthma. Frequent or severe coughing with a simple cold is often a sign of asthma. Chest tightness, shortness of breath, exercise limitations are other symptoms. These can lead to irritability in a younger child. Asthma often starts at an early age. The early symptoms of asthma may go unnoticed for long periods of time.

TREATMENT

Asthma cannot be cured. However, for the majority of children, asthma can be controlled with treatment. Besides avoidance of triggers of your child's asthma, medicines are often required. There are 2 types of medicine used for asthma treatment: "controller" (reduces inflammation and symptoms) and "rescue" (relieves asthma symptoms during acute attacks). Many children require daily medicines to control their asthma.

This general advice cannot cover all possible problems. If there is concern, please contact your physician, healthcare provider or the Emergency Department without delay.



HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- It is important to understand how to treat an asthma attack. If any child with asthma seems to be getting worse and is unresponsive to treatment, seek immediate medical care.
- Get rid of or avoid things that make your child's asthma worse. Depending on your child's asthma triggers, some control measures you can take include:
 - * Changing your heating and air conditioning filter at least once a month.
 - * Placing a filter or cheesecloth over your heating and air conditioning vents.
 - * Limiting your use of fireplaces and wood stoves.
 - * Smoking outside and away from the child, if you must smoke. Change your clothes after smoking. Do not smoke in a car with someone who has breathing problems.
 - * Throwing away plants if you see mold on them.
 - * Cleaning your floors and dusting every week. Use unscented cleaning products. Vacuum when the child is not home. Use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter if possible.
 - * Changing your floors to wood or vinyl if you are remodeling.
 - * Using allergy-proof pillows, mattress covers, and box spring covers, wash bed sheets and blankets every week in hot water and drying them in a dryer. Use a blanket that is made of polyester or cotton with a tight nap.
 - * Limiting stuffed animals to 1 or 2 and washing them monthly with hot water and drying them in a dryer.
 - * Cleaning bathrooms and kitchens with bleach and repainting with mold-resistant paint. Keep the child out of the room while cleaning.
 - * Washing hands frequently.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child has a worsening cough, wheezing, or shortness of breath that are not responding to usual "rescue" medicines.
- There are problems related to the medicine you are giving your child (rash, itching, swelling, or trouble breathing).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child develops severe chest pain.
- Your child's chest, tummy and/or neck are being pulled in with each breath.
- Your child has trouble breathing, walking and talking.
- Your child has a rapid pulse, difficulty breathing, or cannot talk.
- There is a bluish color to the lips or fingernails.

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