

Asthma CAN be controlled

Taking care of your asthma is an important part of your life. Controlling it means working closely with your doctor to learn what to do, staying away from things that bother your airways, taking medicines as directed by your doctor, and monitoring your asthma so that you can respond quickly to signs of an attack. By controlling your asthma every day, you can prevent serious symptoms and take part in all activities. If your asthma is *not* well controlled, you are likely to have symptoms that can make you miss school or work and keep you from doing things you enjoy.

Medicines for asthma

The drugs for asthma can be divided into two categories:

Bronchodilator drugs: These drugs relax the muscle rings around the air passages and thus increase their diameter. As a result, air is able to pass in and out more easily and you feel relief. Therefore, these drugs are also called **relievers**. These are extremely useful drugs because they provide quick relief from symptoms. In most cases, these drugs are prescribed to be taken on an as-needed basis only when symptoms occur.

Anti-inflammatory drugs:

These drugs reduce inflammation (swelling of airways lining due accumulation of fluid and cells). When taken regularly over a long period, these drugs prevent further inflammation. Therefore, these drugs are also called **preventers**.



Resources

If you think you or someone you know may have asthma, see a health care provider or contact one of the resources listed below.

Asthma can be treated- you can live a normal healthy life!

King County Public Health
<http://www.metrokc.gov/health/asthma/>
(206) 296-4600

American Lung Association of Washington
<http://www.alaw.org/>

What's Asthma All About?
<http://www.whatsasthma.org/>

Harborview International Clinic
(206) 731-4192

Al-Shifa Clinic

Email: alshifa@u.washington.edu
Website: <http://students.washington.edu/alshifa>

Asthma

Breathe easier.



What is Asthma?

Asthma (pronounced “Az-muh”) is a chronic disease of the airways, the tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs. If you have asthma, the inside walls of your airways are inflamed (swollen). The inflammation makes the airways very sensitive, so they react strongly to things that you are allergic to or find irritating. When this happens, they get narrower and less air flows through to your lung tissue. This causes symptoms like wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe), coughing, chest tightness, and trouble breathing, especially at night and in the early morning.

Asthma is very common among children in inner cities where polluted air and poor housing make conditions worse. Children whose parents smoke in the home are twice as likely to suffer from asthma attacks, and need more medicine and more frequent hospital treatment. In severe cases, asthma attacks can result in death.

Asthma cannot be cured, but most people with asthma can control it so they can live healthy and active lives.

Asthma Attacks

During an asthma attack, muscles around the airways tighten up, making the airways narrower so less air flows through and an increase in mucous makes it harder to breathe. During an asthma attack, try breathing slowly through your nose, using your **reliever** medications and seek medical attention if medications do not help.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Asthma?

- Coughing: often worse at night or early in the morning, making it hard to sleep.
- Wheezing: a whistling or squeaky sound when you breathe and/or faster breathing.
- Chest tightness: can feel like something is squeezing or sitting on your chest.
- Shortness of breath: feeling that you can't catch your breath, feel out of breath, or you may feel like you can't get enough air in or out of your lungs.

Not all people have these symptoms, and symptoms may vary in severity from one asthma attack to another. Symptoms also differ in how often they occur. Some people with asthma have symptoms only once every few months, others have symptoms every week, and still other people have symptoms every day.

What Causes Asthma Symptoms and Attacks?

There are things in the environment that trigger asthma symptoms and lead to asthma attacks. Some of the more common things include exercise, allergens, irritants, and viral infections. Some people have asthma only when they exercise or have a viral infection.

The list below gives some examples of things that can bring on asthma symptoms.

Allergens

- Animal dander (from the skin, hair, or feathers of animals)

- Dust mites (in house dust)
- Cockroaches
- Pollen from trees and grass
- Mold (indoor and outdoor)

Irritants

- Cigarette smoke
- Air pollution
- Cold air or changes in weather
- Strong odors such as paint

Others

- Medicines such as aspirin and beta-blockers
- Stress
- Infections
- Irritants or allergens that you may be exposed to at your work, such as special chemicals or dusts
- Gastrointestinal Reflux Disease