

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a lung disease. There is no cure, but asthma can be well controlled so that your child can be healthy and enjoy all their favorite activities.

Asthma causes the airways (breathing tubes in the lungs) to get smaller, making it hard to breathe. Common symptoms of asthma are:

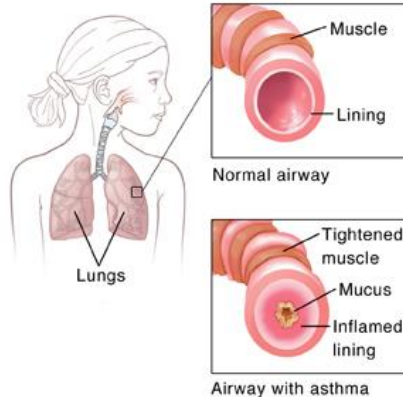
- coughing
- wheezing
- chest tightness
- trouble breathing
- waking at night with cough or trouble breathing

These symptoms may continue but will get better with asthma medicines.

How does asthma make it hard to breathe?

When a child is having asthma symptoms, three things are happening in the lungs.

1. **Inflammation (swelling)** inside of the airway. This means there is less room for air to get in and out of the airway.
2. **Bronchospasms** are when the muscles wrapped around the outside of the airway tighten down. This also means there is less room for air to get in and out.
3. **More mucus** is made than a person without asthma and it can block the airways.



What are triggers and how do they cause an asthma attack?

Lots of things can cause an asthma attack. The things that cause asthma attacks are called triggers. Each child has different triggers for their asthma. Some common triggers are:

- Cigarette smoke (tobacco, marijuana, e-cig)
- Colds and other viruses that affect the nose, throat, airways, and lungs
- Exercise
- Perfumes and other strong smells
- Cold air, weather changes
- Air pollution
- Worry, stress, emotions
- Pollen, dust, molds, animal dander

What other comorbidities (conditions) can occur along with asthma?

- Allergies
- Eczema
- Obstructive sleep apnea
- Obesity
- GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease)
- Stress, anxiety, depression

Medicines

Medicines are used to treat asthma. They make symptoms better by decreasing swelling and bronchospasm. There are three main types of medicine for asthma.

1. **Quick relief inhalers**, like albuterol, quickly relax the muscles around the airways and should make the asthma attack better within 5-10 minutes. These medicines are also called bronchodilators.
2. **Controller medicines** or inhaled steroids are medicines that help to lessen swelling inside the airways, but they don't work fast enough to stop symptoms during an asthma attack. They need to be taken every day, even when your child feels good. This is because they prevent asthma symptoms and attacks. Your child should continue to take these medicines every day as prescribed (especially during increased asthma symptoms).
3. **Oral steroids** may be needed during an asthma attack for asthma symptoms that don't get better with albuterol alone.

All medications may have side effects. Tell your child's doctor about any worries you have about side effects from your child's medicines. It is very important to follow the directions in the asthma action plan on when and how to use your child's asthma medicines.

Asthma control

Asthma is well controlled when:

- Your child can run and play as much as they want
- Your child doesn't miss school, work, or activities
- Your child sleeps well at night
- You can't remember the last time your child had to visit the ER (emergency room) for asthma

Remember the Rules of Two® to check for asthma control

Does your child:

- Have asthma symptoms or take their quick-relief inhaler more than two times a week (not counting pre-treatment for exercise)?
- Wake up at night with asthma symptoms more than two times a month (when feeling well)?
- Refill their quick relief inhaler more than two times a year?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then your child's asthma is not well controlled. Please talk with your child's doctor.

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Follow your “Asthma Action Plan” and get **EMERGENCY CARE** for asthma if your child has these symptoms

- It's hard to breathe while walking or talking
- The muscles in your child's neck, chest, or ribs are pulling in or your child's nostrils are flaring with each breath
- The quick relief inhaler isn't working, and your child is getting worse
- Your child's peak air flow is below 50% of their normal
- Your child's skin or lips look blue, they pass out, or they cannot breathe. **If this happens, call 911 right away.**