

Asthma

DESCRIPTION

Asthma is a chronic disease in which the small airways of the lung become inflamed and narrow. Also, mucus-like phlegm is produced. These factors can restrict the flow of air and make breathing difficult.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Increased work to breathe
- Tightness in the chest
- Dry cough
- Fatigue from labored breathing
- Decreased appetite
- Nighttime symptoms
- Symptoms with exercise or at rest.

COMMON TRIGGERS

- Pollens from grass and trees
- House dusts and molds
- Smoke and pollution
- Infections such as colds and influenza
- Strong odors and scents
- Dander from furry or feathered animals
- Exercise
- Cold air
- Emotional stress.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid all smoke
- Reduce exposure to animal dander
- Reduce dust and mold in the home
- Avoid strong odors and sprays
- Stay indoors with air-conditioning when pollen and mold counts are high
- Discuss the flu shot with your doctor
- Use preventive medication before exercise, if directed by your physician
- Take maintenance medications regularly, not just when you feel like you need them
- Know your warning signs, peak flow zones and when to begin additional treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Severe infections
- Death.

MEDICATIONS

- Quick-acting – *relief medications*– “rescues” or treats an asthma attack
 - Bronchodilators – Proventil®, Ventolin®, Maxair® or albuterol – work to open the small airways by relaxing narrow muscles. It usually works within 15 minutes.
- Long-acting – *control medications* – prevents an asthma attack, but NOT for rescue or treatment
 - Inhaled steroids – Aerobid®, Azmacort®, Beclovent®, Flovent®, Pulmicort® or Vanceril® - work to decrease swelling of the airways. May prevent asthma attacks if used daily. May take two weeks to take action.
 - Inhaled cromolyn (Intal®) or nedocromil (Tilade®) – work to block the airway swelling that happens after exposure to triggers.
 - Leukotriene modifiers – Singulair®, Accolate® or Zyflo® - work to decrease airway swelling after exposure to triggers. Taken orally as tablets or capsules.
- Oxygen - usually only given in the hospital or emergency room.

HELPFUL HINTS

- Keep a regular schedule of visits to your physician for discussion of symptoms and control of asthma
- Measure peak flow readings daily
- Wear or carry information stating that you have asthma and your medications.

CONSIDER NOTIFYING YOUR PHYSICIAN IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Difficulty breathing
- Increased wheezing
- A peak flow below 70 percent of your personal best
- Chronic cough or other nighttime symptoms
- Respiratory infection with high fever.