

Asthma



A lot of children get **asthma**. Asthma cuts down the air flow in the lungs. This makes it hard to breathe. These are all symptoms of asthma:

- **Chronic** coughing.
- Trouble breathing.
- Tight feeling in the chest.
- Wheezing.

(*Note:* Other things can cause wheezing, too. Something may be stuck in the throat or there may be an infection. Always tell the doctor if your child is wheezing. See “Wheezing” at www.HealthyLearn.com.)

Asthma symptoms come and go. An asthma “attack” can be big or small. Asthma can get worse when your child is upset or worried. But it’s a real **physical** problem. A doctor should treat your child if he or she has asthma. Asthma runs in families. Children who have **eczema** or hay fever often have asthma, too. Asthma may be more common in children who live in houses with pets and tobacco smoke.

Asthma attacks can come on with:

- Colds, flu, and other infections in the throat and lungs.
- Breathing pollen from plants, mold, animal **dander**, dust, or smoke.
- Sulfites. These are additions in some foods.

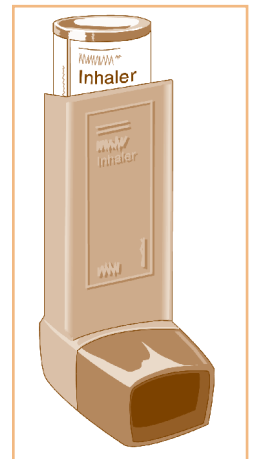
- Taking some medicines, like aspirin.
- Breathing cold air.
- Exercising too hard.
- Getting upset, angry, or “stressed out.”

The right asthma treatment depends on how bad the attacks are. It’s hard to treat asthma with medicines you buy without a **prescription**. Your child’s doctor should keep track of how your child is doing. The doctor may prescribe one or more medicines for your child’s asthma. Some kinds of medicines are for your child to take during an asthma attack. Other kinds are taken daily or as prescribed to help prevent asthma attacks. Medicines include:

■ **Bronchodilators.**

These drugs open up the airways in the body. They come either as a spray or as something you swallow.

- Drugs to help with swelling of the airways in the body. They come either as a spray, or as pills you swallow.
- Drugs to help with **chronic** swelling of the airways in the body. They come as pills.






- **Peak flow meter.** This is a device to monitor your child's asthma at home.
- **Flu vaccine.** This is given once a year.


Questions to Ask

Does your child have any of these problems?


- Blue color around the lips.
- Has to sit up to breathe.
- Can't talk or make normal sounds.
- Has very noisy, grunting sounds with breathing.

YES  **Get Medical Care Fast**


Is your child wheezing a lot? Does your child's chest feel tight? Is it hard for your child to breathe?

YES  **Get Medical Care Fast**


With asthma, does your child have a fever or a cold? Or is he or she coughing up green, yellow, or bloody-colored mucus?

YES  **See Doctor**

Does your child's asthma attack stay just as bad, no matter what you do for it?


YES  **See Doctor**

Are your child's asthma attacks coming more often or getting worse?

YES  **See Doctor**

NO

Has a child who does not have asthma had a cough for more than 1 week and he or she was not sick with a cold or other problem?

YES  **Call Doctor**

NO

 **Use Self-Care**

Self-Care Tips

- *Don't* smoke or let your child smoke. *Don't* allow smoking in the house.
- Have your child drink a lot of water, juice, and other fluids. (Ask your child's doctor how much fluid your child should have each day.)
- Find out what triggers your child's asthma. Get rid of things that bother your child at home, at school, and where he or she plays.
- If you don't have a dog, cat, or other pet, don't get one. If you have a pet, keep it outside if you can. If not, don't let it in your child's bedroom.
- Keep things your child is allergic to out of his or her bedroom.
- Have your child sleep with no pillow or the kind the doctor says is O.K.



- Cover your child's mattress and pillow with a plastic cover or one that says *allergen-free*. Wash mattress pads in hot water every week.
- Use throw rugs that can be washed often instead of carpets. **Pollen**, pet **dander**, mold, and **dust mites** collect in carpets. Use blinds and curtains that can be washed often, too.

- Try not to have stuffed animals kept in your child's bedroom. Or have only one that can be washed. Wash it in hot water once a week.



- If you can, use a vacuum with a HEPA filter and double-thickness bags. When you vacuum, have your child wear a filter mask over his or her nose and mouth.
- Use air filters with your furnace and air-conditioning unit. Or use portable air cleaners to keep the air clean. Change or wash filters often. Keep the **humidifier** filter clean, if you use one. Use distilled (not tap) water in humidifiers and **vaporizers**.

- *Don't* hang sheets and blankets outside to dry. **Pollen** can get on them.
- It's good for your child to do sports like swimming. But tell your child to stop exercising if he or she starts to wheeze.
- When outdoors in cold weather, have your child wear a scarf around his or her mouth and nose. The scarf warms the air before your child breathes it in.
- *Don't* let your child eat foods or medicines that have sulfites. Shellfish, for example, often have sulfites. They bother many people with asthma.
- Have your child sit up during an asthma attack. *Don't* let your child lie down.
- *Don't* run out of your child's asthma medicine. Keep the medicine handy. Have your child take it as soon as he or she starts to feel an attack.
- *Don't* give your child aspirin! Some people with asthma are allergic to aspirin. Use acetaminophen instead.

(**Note:** Aspirin and other medicines that have **salicylates** have been linked to **Reye's Syndrome**, a condition that can kill. See "Signs of Reye's Syndrome" at www.HealthyLearn.com.)