

PARENT EDUCATION

Asthma

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Asthma is common. More than 9 million adults and 5 million children have the disease. Asthma is an inflammation and swelling of the airway. Airways react to things like smoke, dust, pollen, fumes etc. Airways become narrow causing the child to wheeze, have shortness of breath and chest tightness. Also, airways produce a lot of thick mucus which makes the child cough and adds to the shortness of breath.

Asthma that is not well controlled can cause many problems and in some rare cases can result in death. However, we have many medications that help to get asthma under control as long as you strictly follow instructions.

Your child's asthma is not under control if your child has any of these symptoms:

- Coughing.
- Wheezing.
- Shortness of breath or chest tightness during the day or at night causing the child to wake.
- Shortness of breath or chest tightness soon after exercise.
- Child needs frequently quick relief medications such as Albuterol or Xopenex.
- Child's asthma prevents child from doing his or her favorite activities.
- Child is missing a lot of school days due to asthma.
- If your child was admitted or seen in the ER for Asthma.
- If your child is having ill effects from Asthma medications.

There are two main kinds of medications:

1. Short term quick relief medications: e.g. Albuterol, Xopenex, Ventolin, Proventil, that the child takes when he or she is sick; Asthma attack.

2. Long term control medications: e.g. Pulmicort, Azmacort, Intal, Singulair, Salmeterol etc. These help to prevent symptoms. The child needs to take these medications all the time, even if he or she is healthy and has no symptoms. It often takes a few weeks before you feel the full effects of these medications. Your child may need these medications if he or she has symptoms three or more times a week, or symptoms at night three or more times a month. Make it part of your routine to give him or her these medications daily.

You can help to prevent asthma attacks by staying away from things that make your child's Asthma worse. You need to find out what makes your child's asthma worse.

Tobacco Smoke

- If you smoke, ask your doctor for ways to help you quit. Ask family members to quit too. If you can't stop smoking you should smoke outside.
- Do not allow smoking in your home or around your child.
- Be sure no one smokes at a child's day care center.

Dust Mites

Most people with asthma are allergic to dust mites. Dust mites are tiny bugs that can't be seen

- Encase your child's mattress in a special dust proof cover.
- Encase your pillows in a special dust proof cover or wash them every week with hot water (hotter than 130° F) to kill the mites.
- Wash sheets and blankets every week with hot water.
- Reduce indoor humidity to less than 50% using dehumidifiers or central air conditioners.
- Remove rugs from bedrooms if possible.
- Keep stuffed toys out of the bed or wash them weekly in hot water. You may also put them in a plastic bag.

Animal Dander

The best thing to do is to keep furred or feathered pets out of your home but if you cannot:

- Keep the pet out of your child's bedroom and keep bedroom doors closed.
- Cover the air vents in the bedroom or filter the air.
- Remove rugs and furniture covered in cloth from the house. If this is not possible, keep pets out of the rooms where these pieces of furniture are located.

Cockroaches

- Keep all food out of the bedroom.
- Keep food and garbage in closed containers.
- Use poison baits, powders, gels or paste. Make sure that your child is not around these materials.
- If a spray is used, keep your child out of the room until the odor goes away.

Other Actions

- Keep the child home when it is extremely hot, cold, windy or humid if possible.
- Plan regular exercise especially the kind that develops lung capacity: swimming is terrific. Avoid strenuous exercise and always warm up for 6-10 minutes before exercise.
- Make sure the child won't come near fumes from insecticides, cleaning fluids, chlorine, fresh paint, perfume etc.
- Avoid keeping the child around other sick kids as respiratory infection can trigger asthma.
- Avoid putting the child under emotional stress.
- Keep a record of asthma attacks and look for patterns on where and when the attacks occur to decide a prevention strategy.
- Don't use a wood burning stove, kerosene heater or fire place.
- Keep child away from vacuum cleaning or use dust mask. Double layered, micro filter bags or a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter may also be effective.
- To reduce molds, fix leaky faucets, pipes or other sources of water and clean moldy surfaces with bleach cleaner.
- During allergy season keep windows closed and stay indoors during midday and the afternoon.
- Get flu shot every season.
- Cover the nose and mouth with a scarf on cold or windy days.