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Advice From Your Allergist About Asthma Symptoms and Triggers

Many people think of asthma as an “attack:” one minute you feel okay and the next you have to gasp for air. But asthma can actually cause a range of symptoms, from mild to very serious.

Perhaps you wheeze, making a squeaky or whistling sound when you breathe. You might have frequent chest colds or bronchitis a few times a year. Or maybe your only symptom is cough that wakes you up at night or happens when you exercise or laugh.

Medicine can be prescribed to control lung inflammation and reduce most asthma symptoms. However, poorly controlled asthma can be dangerous. Rarely, the progression of inflammation and airway constriction may even result in death. Fortunately, this is extremely uncommon with currently available treatment.

Allergists are doctors who have specialized training and experience to help you understand your asthma and your asthma triggers. This information can help you better control your asthma symptoms.

If your asthma is in control, you can expect to:

- Be active, even play sports, without having asthma symptoms
- Sleep through the night
- Prevent almost all asthma attacks
- Avoid emergency room visits or hospital stays

- Reduce your need for quick-relief medicines
- Have lungs that work well
- Avoid side effects from medicines
- Not miss work or school because of asthma
- Continue normal activities

What is asthma?

Asthma is a condition that causes episodes of decreased airflow within the lungs. This may result in a variety of symptoms, including difficulty breathing, wheezing, chest tightness or cough.

Decreased airflow in asthma is caused by inflammation, which is mucus build-up, redness, irritation and dead cells in the lungs. Such inflammation can lead to constriction, or tightening, of the air passages. This constriction is not constant, but instead comes and goes. Therefore, asthma symptoms also tend to come and go. When the tightening is severe and prolonged it can lead to very severe symptoms. This situation is referred to as an “asthma attack.”

Who has asthma and why?

Asthma is very common, affecting more than 25 million people in the United States, including almost 7 million children. No one

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knows for sure why some people have asthma and others don't. People who have family members with allergies or asthma are more likely to have asthma.

Many people who have asthma also have allergies. In many cases, allergies can trigger asthma symptoms or an asthma attack. This is called "allergic asthma" and is the most common form of asthma. It is often triggered by allergens like dust mites, animal dander, mold and pollen.

What are asthma symptoms?

Many people do not know they have asthma, especially if their symptoms are not severe. But any asthma symptom may indicate poor asthma control.

The most common asthma symptoms are:

- Cough, especially at night, with exercise, or when laughing
- Trouble breathing
- A tight feeling in the chest
- Wheezing – a squeaky or whistling sound

Sometimes a cough that won't go away is the only symptom. Asthma symptoms often happen at night and in the morning, but they can happen any time. They get worse when you are around your asthma triggers.

What triggers asthma?

Triggers can cause asthma symptoms. Not everyone has the same triggers.

Asthma triggers include:

- Allergens such as pollen, dust mites, mold, as well as cats, dogs and other animals
- Irritants such as tobacco smoke, air pollution, some chemicals, gases and strong odors like perfume and cleaning supplies
- Exercise
- Medicines such as aspirin
- Cold air or sudden weather changes
- Health conditions such as obesity, sleep apnea, acid reflux, common colds, sinus infections, stress and depression

Anyone with allergies and asthma should be able to feel good, be active all day and sleep well at night. No one should accept less. Your allergist can:

- Identify the source of your suffering and develop a treatment plan to reduce symptoms
- Provide you with the most cost-effective care and best outcomes.

Get tested! Get treated! Get better!



For more information about allergy treatment, and to locate a board-certified allergist in your area, visit AllergyAndAsthmaRelief.org.

Board-certified allergists are specialists in diagnosing and treating allergies and asthma.