

Asthma

Prevention

The key to prevention is avoiding triggers including:

- Allergens
- Respiratory infections including colds and the flu (yearly flu vaccine recommended)
- Extreme changes in air temperature
- Cold air (asthmatics should cover their nose and mouth when exercising outdoors in cold weather)
- Emotional and stressful situations
- Smoking
- Exposure to smoke, strong odours and air pollution (purify indoor air)
- Certain medications (speak to your pharmacist or doctor before taking any medications, even if they are natural or over-the-counter products)

For more information or support:

Canadian Lung Association

www.lung.ca

Allergy / Asthma Information Association

www.aaia.ca

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Asthma is a chronic disease that affects the airways. Asthma sufferers experience swelling of the airways and excess mucus production, resulting in narrowing of the airways.

Causes

The exact cause of asthma is unknown; however, having a family history of asthma and factors such as allergies may play a role.

Asthma is an exaggerated reaction by the airways to a foreign substance (allergen), including dust and pollen, resulting in airway swelling. Other factors that may cause such swelling are smoke, pollution, and respiratory infections.

Our airways are surrounded by muscle. When the airways are inflamed they

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become more sensitive and react by constricting. This is known as bronchospasm. Exposure to cold air, exercise, and stress can trigger constriction.

Symptoms

Bronchial inflammation and bronchospasm obstruct airflow, causing the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Bronchial secretions
- Rapid breathing in young children

The intensity of symptoms can vary among individuals and over time.

Diagnosis

The first step in diagnosing asthma involves a medical examination and a questionnaire about your symptoms. Your doctor may also want to test your pulmonary function to see how well your lungs are working. Additional tests, such as allergy skin tests, blood tests, or chest x-rays may also be ordered.

Proper Inhaler Technique

Using proper inhaling techniques will ensure better efficacy. Your pharmacist can help show you proper techniques and may also recommend using a spacer and metered dose inhaler, which will make it easier for you to take your medication.

Treatment

There are two categories of asthma medications: Controllers and Relievers.

Control medications are the cornerstone of asthma management. Controllers are anti-inflammatories that prevent and reduce inflammation inside air passages. They work slowly and should be taken regularly, even when asthma symptoms are not present. They help prevent asthma symptoms, reduce exacerbations as well as asthma-related hospitalizations and deaths. While corticosteroids are the most commonly prescribed controller medication, other controllers may be added to the treatment plan. They are administered using an inhaler (puffer), as a liquid, or a pill.

Relievers are bronchodilators. They are also known as "rescue" medications because they are used in emergency situations. Their effects are felt within minutes as they relax the muscles around the airways. They are used as needed in the treatment of asthma attacks and to prevent exercise-induced asthma. Using a reliever less than four times a week is a sign that asthma is controlled.