

What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease of the lungs. When you breathe, air goes in and out of your lungs through small tubes called airways. With asthma, two main things happen in the airways of your lungs:

- **Inflammation** (irritation)—the airways become swollen and fill with mucus
- **Constriction**—the muscles around the airways tighten, making the airways narrower

Both these things make it hard for you to breathe and can cause asthma symptoms.

Asthma Symptoms

You may have all, some, or just one of these symptoms. They can be mild or severe and change from day to day.

- Wheezing—a whistling noise when you breathe
- Coughing
- Chest tightness—a feeling that someone is sitting on your chest
- Shortness of breath
- Trouble breathing at night and in the early morning
- Mucus (phlegm or sputum)

Some of the more common things that can bring on asthma symptoms include exercise, allergens, irritants, and viral infections.

An Asthma Attack

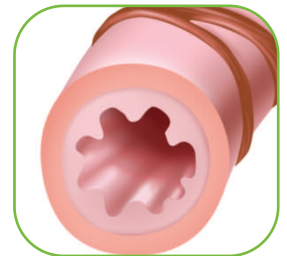
Your asthma symptoms are a sign that a flare-up may be starting. When your asthma symptoms become worse than usual, it is called an asthma attack. In a severe asthma attack, the airways can tighten so much that not enough oxygen can get to your vital organs. People can die from severe asthma attacks. Most people with asthma can manage their disease and have fewer asthma symptoms and attacks.

Learn How to Manage Your Asthma

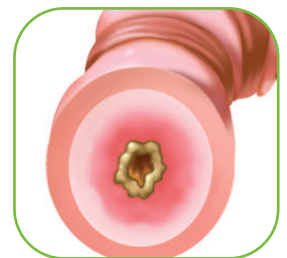
You can help manage your asthma by working with your doctor and following these guidelines:

- Sit down with your doctor to develop an Asthma Action Plan. Follow it.
- Know your asthma triggers and how to stay away from them when possible.
- Take your controller medicine daily as prescribed by your doctor, even if you feel fine and don't have any asthma symptoms.
- Watch for warning signs of asthma flare-ups and follow your Asthma Action Plan right away.

Asthma cannot be cured but you CAN enjoy an active life with better asthma management. Talk to your doctor about how to manage your asthma.



Normal airway



Airway during an asthma attack