

Asthma: Managing Your Condition

Asthma is a serious and occasionally fatal disease. However, with a careful diagnosis, expert medical treatment, and responsible self-care, most people with asthma lead normal, healthy lives.

Causes

It is not exactly clear what causes asthma. Those who seem more at risk of developing the condition include individuals with a family history of asthma or allergies, or those who were exposed to tobacco smoke, infections, and certain allergens early in life.

Symptoms

Common asthma symptoms include the following:

- Coughing that is often worse at night or early in the morning
- Wheezing (a whistling or squeaky sound when breathing)
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath
- Faster or noisy breathing
- Trouble breathing, especially at night and in the early morning

Attacks

Many factors can lead to an asthma attack. Some people may only have an attack if a combination of triggers is present. Asthma triggers are essentially anything that

makes symptoms appear or worsen, such as:

- **Allergens**—Animal dander (from skin, hair, or feathers), dust mites (contained in house dust), cockroaches, pollen from trees and grass, and mold (both indoor and outdoor)

- **Irritants**—Cigarette smoke, air pollution, cold air or changes in weather, strong odors from painting or cooking, scented products, strong emotional expression (including crying or laughing hard), stress, and exercise.
- **Other triggers**—Medicines such as aspirin and beta-blockers; sulfites in food or beverages; gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) that causes heartburn and can worsen asthma symptoms; infections; and irritants or allergens that one may be exposed to at work, such as special chemicals or dusts.

Treatment

Treatments for asthma include:

- **Self-management**—Make plans for controlling asthma daily and an emergency [action plan](#) for stopping attacks.
- **Avoiding triggers**—Remove dust-catchers from the bedroom and keep humidity levels in your home low. Consider using an air filter in the bedroom. Do not smoke cigarettes or spend time in environments where others are smoking and try changing your workouts to put less stress on your breathing.
- **Medication**—Use preventive (long-term control) and rescue (quick-relief) asthma medications; sometimes allergy medications and shots are recommended as well.

Prognosis

There is no cure for asthma, but with proper treatment:

- Your asthma can be controlled.
- You will have fewer attacks.
- You should not need to use quick-relief medicines as often.
- You should be able to do normal activities without having symptoms.